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# **The Feral, the Art Object and the Social**

by Lana Locke

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)  
at the University of the Arts London,  
Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges of Art

July 2017



# Abstract

This practice-based research explores the nature of the feral, as manifested in an object-based installation practice of contemporary art that scavenges - physically, socially and metaphorically - in the gap between defined spaces. My conception of the feral draws out the political promise of this indeterminacy: the state of being partly wild and partly civilised. The page is also constructed materially, as a space where heterogeneous elements meet: different voices expressed through the writing and images of my practice.

In claiming the feral as a critical concept, I reject its more common, derogatory, usage. In particular, during the 2011 London riots, the former British Lord Chancellor Kenneth Clarke labelled the rioters a “feral underclass”, seeking to fix them in this uncivilised, abject position. I unfix this separation, through a feral interpretation of my objects, as they interpenetrate domestic, institutional, and civilised public spheres. Mother’s milk solidifies as plaster-filled condom bombs, at once phallic and breast-like, poised to ignite a pyre of social theory texts in a gallery project space, a former factory; haphazard conglomerations of plant matter and urban debris are strung together in bunting on an inner-city community hall.

The feral becomes here a rival concept to Julia Kristeva’s formulation of abjection, as the seeping bodily organs evoked by my objects are not defined in terms of the individual, but reflected on through the formless mass of the social body, the displaced undercommons of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, the wild of Jack Halberstam, the rioters of Joshua Clover.

The feral has an antagonistic quality, but it cannot fit the relational models of art put forward by Chantal Mouffe and Claire Bishop that seek to civilise this antagonism. Neither can the positivity of Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman new materialism extract the hybridity of materials I use from the precariousness of the social conditions from which they are drawn. My practice, like the feral, resists these separations.

Times New Roman,  
12 point,  
1.5 line spacing:  
this is an  
academic voice.

The voice is still  
mine, but it reports  
on the project in  
terms of recognised  
theorists and  
practitioners and lets  
it be known,  
in known terms,  
that what I am doing  
can be classified as  
new knowledge and  
understanding, as  
befitting doctoral  
study.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I owe huge thanks to my supervisors, Dave Beech and Dr Mo Throp, and in my first year David Cross, for the time and energy they have given in helping me to reflect on my project and develop it into this thesis; and the varied avenues of thought they have opened up for me. I further thank the Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Colleges of Arts' research team, technical staff, particularly in Chelsea's foundry and ceramics workshops, and Chelsea's library staff. I am greatly indebted to the University of the Arts London (UAL) for the financial support of the UAL Research Studentship, and Chelsea Arts Club Trust for their bursary during my first year of study.

I am also very grateful to my husband Toby Paton for the unending support he has given me throughout this project.

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- pp. 142,144,159-160,164,167-168,179,182-183 *The Drips* installation, *Carnival Glass* exhibition, Block 336, London, 2015-16.
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### Appendix A:

1. *Mother's Milk*, video, 03:41, 2016.
2. *Painting the Roses Red*, video documentation of Grenfell Tower performance/installation, 07:38, 2017, video (c) Toby Paton.

# Introduction

The feral has been present for me as an elusive idea, resonating with my practice, since Clarke's (2011) citing of a "feral underclass" in August 2011. This was a few weeks before I started my Masters in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Arts, and the point at which my practice started to unravel from sculptures of discreet, beautiful, abstract figures into casts of decomposing fruit skins, haemorrhaging money, and photographs of piles of rubbish. The anger and powerlessness I felt against the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government as they imposed their austerity agenda and junked huge sections of public services, with other sectors similarly cutting jobs, was felt at a personal level as my long-term employment fragmented during the course of the MA and my existence became more precarious, but more embedded in my changing art practice.

The fragmentary style of this thesis reflects the fragments I use in my interventions and installations, like organs outside the cohesive housing of a body, pieced together to explore a relation with each other and with the different spaces in which they operate.

Throughout the document I will observe the University's requirement for a 4 cm left-hand margin, and for all other margins to be at least 1.5cm. No requirement is given to display the document in a portrait layout, and I resist this convention.

Whilst the resonance of the word feral stayed with me, and became a quality I sometimes used to describe my art objects, I did not dissect it academically until much later. When thinking in 2013 of a proposal for doctoral study, I became more interested in ideas related to what my artwork could *do* to change the current political situation - a situation which has only become more right-wing and more separatist over the course of this doctorate - than ideas implying an introspective interrogation of the practice and of myself. Moreover, as there was no canonised theory of the feral from which to draw, and therefore no clear indication of a strategy or methodology to arise from it, the feral appeared as a quality of my practice that bubbled beneath these ideas rather than a legitimate avenue of academic exploration in itself. I had started to create unauthorised interventions in public and community spaces and felt that I needed to keep up this impetus to work in the street in order for the practice to be politically worthwhile. As such, the allure of Chantal Mouffe's agonism (Mouffe, 2013) was in her optimism for changing things, her plan of how to make this happen, and the role she gave to artists within this.

Sometime midway through this study, I would realise that it was the very

illegitimacy and  
under-theorised nature of the feral that would allow  
form it into  
me to creatively a concept for myself.

As my concept of the feral developed and I

dug

In philosophical terms, assembling thoughts side by side as different voices operating in parallel is reflected in this landscape format where no voice is allowed to dominate or prescribe order, echoing Jack Halberstam's comment that "anarchies are interested in the horizontal, the sideways, the adjacent; as opposed to the verticality of power that always assumes a hierarchy" (Halberstam, 2014, 45:10).

deeper into it, I discovered more artists, thinkers and groups intrigued by this word. Interpretations of the feral vary significantly; I attempt to wrestle with some, others I pick up and incorporate untouched scraps of, allowing different fragments identified by others as feral to float up and pierce this piece of writing in juxtapositions of support and contrast, as I do the fragments found from the disparate fields of artist practitioners and writers that have formed my own conception - whether or not they use that word in particular. Through assembling these fragments across the space of the pages of this thesis - drawing across them, tearing through them, slicing them up and moulding and transforming them into something of mine - this written work becomes another form of my installation practice.

As such, whilst there may be a temptation to argue for a singular definition of the feral, that is distinct from any other, this would risk seeking to categorise that which resists a confirmed definition, undermining the very agency and fluidity of the feral that allows me to reclaim Kenneth Clarke's (2011) statement; much as I am arguing against categorisations of art that seek to designate *either* 'social' or 'material' forms of practice.

Some have tried to take up the feral as an affirmative term, for example where journalist George Monbiot (2014) seeks to turn it into a strategy for reintegrating what he sees as the limitations of one's otherwise domesticated existence with wild nature, and for correcting the impact of

Whatever the aspirations  
 ascribed to the word,  
 underneath them  
 will  
 be the  
 festering  
 feral. earth  
 another and  
 of worm  
 -pit

farming in the UK through rewilding. Whilst resonances and differences between the feral and the wild will emerge in the different theories that flow through this piece, I similarly allow these to bump and cross, as objects interpenetrating each other, rather than seeking to carve up one against another. The feral offers a way of thinking about the entanglement of art across different spaces, theories and practices. Mel Y Chen describes her approach to the concept of animacy as “feral”, which for her means taking risks with the “borders of disciplinarity” and what might constitute a “proper archive” for her text (2012, p.18). Her approach resonates further as she explores a similar fluidity and movement of meaning in relation to her concept of animacy as I do to my concept of the feral “Animacy seems almost to flutter away from the proper grasp of linguistics, refusing to be ‘pinned down.’ Thus, the very animate quality of the term

itself is useful, not least because it has the potential to move among disciplines” (2012, p.9). Meanwhile my concept of the feral, as enacted through my art practice, is in crossing not just the borders of disciplinarity within art, and between art and non-art, but also physical borders, from the internal, white cube gallery space, through the building’s social context, to protests and interventions on the street, and back again.

The multiplicity of meanings produces heterogeneity; a heterogeneity valued by Chantal Mouffe, but missed in her more narrow definitions of critical art when describing its role in agonistic struggle. This text argues for the critical, social role of a studio-originating art practice that is left out of the definitions of social art of theorists such as Mouffe, with the heritage of Hannah Arendt before it, Claire Bishop and art criticism that has followed it, considering why it may be timely for the notion of socially engaged art to be rethought beyond its most literal interpretations, and for studio art to cross the borders of the public space, the contentious space, the community space.

As much as my interest in the word feral has widened, deepened, and diversified, its primary significance for me remains a direct retaliation against Clarke’s usage of it to disparage and dismiss an indicated social - if not racial - group; a retaliation which might now equally be applied against the purist right-wing populism that has bullied its way into the mainstream in the UK and the US since 2016 to marginalise those foreign bodies imagined to be a threat to the white working class. As such, my ideas are borne out of oppositionality rather than the affirmative position of a manifesto. Yet through the practice of making objects, installations, words on the page, there is a creative hope that others will share in wanting to change things; that we will continue to challenge the impositions imposed on our collective existence; and that we will continue to circumvent and survive despite them.

Increasingly, the objects I make are not finished sculptures but

bits,

organs –

and sometimes they are sculptures of organs –

props for action that later make sense when I am given or create a context for an installation.

|  
|

This could be seen as any or all of:

- i) continuing the failed project of the avant garde to challenge the notion of the “work of art” as outlined by Peter Bürger (1984, p.55-82);
- ii) an anti–hierarchical attempt to shape the “maddeningly elusive” flesh of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s *Multitude* (2006, p.192);
- iii) a reflection of the “dividedness of the unitary subject” described by Julia Kristeva (1984, p. 139) .

|  
|

At the time of making, confronted with empty space, they are made for the sake of making

#### *SOMETHING:*

physicalising otherwise unarticulated concerns and frustrations.

The Oxford English Dictionary cites the earliest usage of the feral,

“1604, T. Wright, *Passions of Minde* (new ed.), v. 268,

‘Some..arrive at a certayne ferall or savage brutishnesse.’”

(Anon, 2017(b))





Travelling underground on 20th June 2015  
to Bank station, a stop before  
it I put on my wearable artwork of  
re-  
cy-  
cl-  
ing  
bag-dress-  
melded-with-  
old-football-  
via-dripped  
latex.

There were visitors in the project space as  
I installed, not just my daughter but many  
insects: spiders, ants, ladybirds.

When we took down the masking-taped-up  
drawings at the end of the exhibition there  
were

<woodlice>  
<trapped>  
<inside.>

The ball, I recall, I had found in the street on the half-hour walk between college and my studio.

Why had I decided to walk?

To transport an artwork? To save money on bus fare?

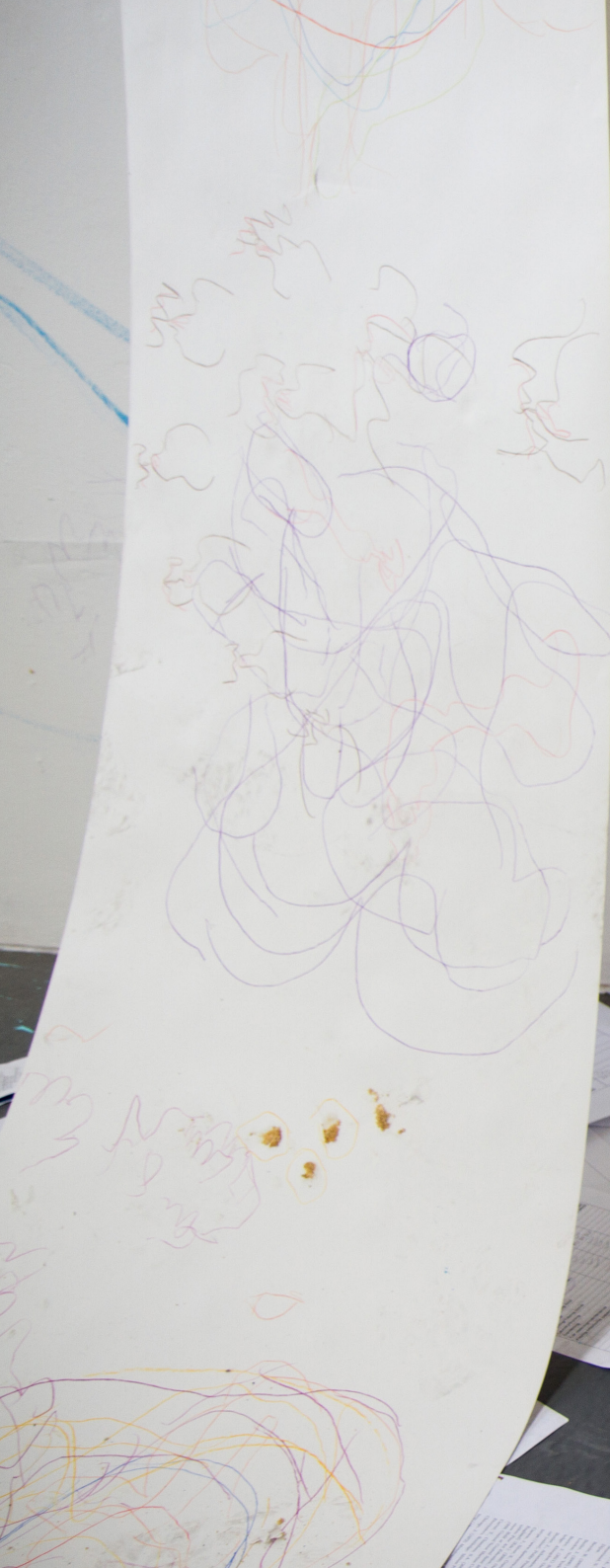
The latex I remember had been going off in my studio and needed using up.



The recycling bag is emblazoned with the crest of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London. These bags are provided free to residents, with strict guidelines as to what should and should not be placed inside.

Living in a small housing association flat in this wealthy, leafy borough, in 2011-12 I took photographs of the Council's (since abandoned) practice of attaching brightly coloured labels to rubbish on the streets that had been put out wrongly, printed with such words as "WRONG DAY", "ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME SCENE: furniture",











I re-found, collected up and brought to the installation space piles of the contrasting, overlapping, mish-mash of papers and books that occupy my studio, home, desktop: art theory texts to antenatal class notes, sketch books, leaflets, appointment cards. I laid them on the floor and pulled out pieces that caught my eye, pieces the viewer might see whilst walking around the space, taking pleasure in revealing the mundane as much as the provocative: a list produced with my husband in an antenatal class of who would do what chores after birth, with its gendered labour implications; pictures of orgasmic birth from a book by radical midwife Ina May Gaskin (2008), whose premise of 'empowering' a woman not to feel pain in natural childbirth prompted a mixed reaction from feminist groups (Shapiro, 2012), and are placed here as much as a threat as a delight.

Some of these papers, like the old copies of a formal piece of PhD writing for examination, had already turned into scrap material for drawing on in the studio, firstly with and of my daughter, and then around her moving figure, aged ten months at the time of the exhibition. I recorded the outline of her seated, shifting legs and bottom, occasional crawl of her knees, standing on feet, planting of hand for support or exploration.

Even those recordings shifted, as she pushed the paper to the side and the lines no longer met up. This disturbed the timeline of the movements spilling on to different bits

"ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME SCENE: carpet" publicly shaming the trash as an extension of their owners.

Given their free availability, I use the bags as disposable coverings for tables that I work on, but in this case, the plastic attached to the latex I had poured over the football and I decided to use it as part of the work. It is waste that is incorporated rather than rejected as abject, that is reused to erupt elsewhere, commandeered in a cheap approach that creates an openness to materials.

(There is an artistic filter but

"1838 Blackwood's Mag. 43 789 A..more potent charm..which converts the *feral* into the *human* being." (Anon, 2017(b))

it is unsealed: the gaps in it allow for the crap of the everyday.)





of paper. However, she had no compunction about moving the paper, screwing it up. She is not yet domesticated to distinguish between what belongs where, what is precious and what is trash: she wrecks any such presuppositions.

I thought of Michael Heizer's *Dragged Mass Displacement* (1971), and later re-read Lucia Jalon Oyarzun's account of how Heizer's displacement of tons of earth did not go according to plan: whilst it was "intended to show the destructive nature of mass when dragged through the grounds of the museum" it instead "simply slid through it" (2014, p.62). Oyarzun cites "object-oriented philosophy" when pointing out how "Heizer had granted materiality to the slab, but not to the ground" (2014, p.65). However, what her example highlights for me is the subject's - here the artist's - interaction with matter, as tractors had to be brought in to allow Heizer to overcome his human miscalculation. Or in my exhibition's context: my daughter's unpredictable interactions with paper.

George Monbiot commences *Feral* (2014, p.7) with the complaint that his ambitions for a wilder existence are pegged back by such duties as "looking after [his] daughter and [his] house". Yet his linking of his child with the

Moreover, as I wear the bag like a dress, I become a subject moving through both this equipment for managing waste and the matter that spills out of

it; myself at the time a subject with another subject growing out of me: a conjoined social unit.

In *October's* recent Questionnaire on Materialisms, Michael Newman notes (Apter et al, 2016, p.73)

It's curious that approaches to the world that seek to make some kind of contact with a materiality that is independent of the human subject can only do so by having recourse to fiction, which, so far as we know, only humans produce... It is easier to see how the subject may be reduced to matter or relations than to understand how an integral object may be maintained independently of a subject.

My creation of sculptural objects can be conceived as the reduction of the human to a shared commonality of matter, often either tracing the subject's imprint in this matter, invoking the internal human body through plants, debris, or other inhuman matter. However, I agree with Newman that to transcend one's own mind, own state of being, to think the subject out of the equation seems impossible. One is always stuck with oneself.

domestic space is a form of convention in itself; as Jack Halberstam says, “If you believe that children need training, you assume and allow for the fact that they are always already anarchic and rebellious, out of order and out of time” (2011, p.27).

As I work in spaces for making and showing art, being a mother introduces a mixing of spheres, a mixing that might speak of an implicit feral, a feral that needs no “rewilding”. With this wild, unpredictable young human in tow I am not always able to conform to the conventions of the space in which I bring her: she shouts, she cries, she demands instant nourishment; her bodily functions wait for no one. I cannot act solely in the role of ‘artist’ as this personal relationship is carried with me.

Gillian Perry criticises the sensationalist myth-making that surrounded the artists’ group known as the Fauves, where, “[Louis] Vauxcelle’s use of the metaphor of ‘wild beasts’ to describe the boldly applied, seemingly unfinished areas of bright colour in canvases by Matisse, Derain and their friends, carried with it connotations of violent masculine force” (Perry, 1995, p.45). She demonstrates how this framing of the work excluded female painters of the same period, and how this ‘wild beast’ tag was used to play up the shocking impact of the work when documentation shows that “the critical reception of these exhibitions was by no means exclusively ‘outraged’” (Perry, 1995, p.55). However, what Perry does not do is reconceive the female within the wild; the wild within the female. In my feral mixing of such associations, the apparently domestic, civilised, feminine and feminising task of child rearing is in fact far wilder and messier in its uncontrollability than these masculinised visions of freedom and creativity. Yet it is also limited by, dependent upon, and must find a way to move within the spaces in which it must survive.

The crossover of different types and sources of research material in the Dolph space does not extend to the pulverising entropy of Heizer. Yet Georges Bataille’s *Formless* (1985, p.31) is still present as an idea amongst this swarming mass of paperwork:

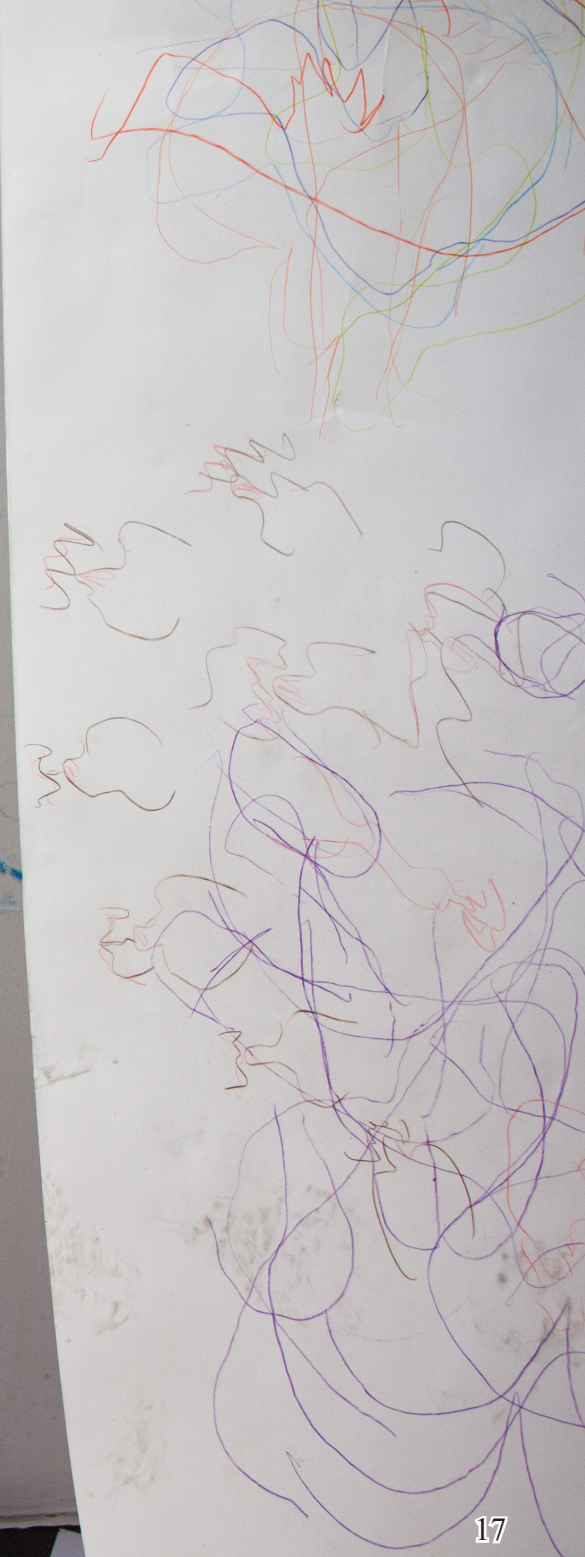
For academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.

I am following the formless in the sense in which Benjamin Noys interprets it, where rather than being “*completely* formless... the formless is always *in-form*, but it is never absorbed by that form... Matter for Bataille is always ‘active’... never settling within a frame or an image but always emerging from an image, a word or things” (Noys’ emphasis, 2000, p.35).

Similarly, the feral appears to indicate never settling categories of people or animals (not rural, not wild, not domestic but *feral*): out of place yet not mixed to the degree of losing their identification completely. Or rather, their identification becomes the very state of being out of place.

Moreover, I seek to put this crossover of materials in







In paralleling two recent projects: the one, collaborative, *Art Riot* (2015) taking place in the context of a protest march, the other, singular, *Lana Locke* (2016), an exhibition in a gallery project space, some would tell me that these avenues of practice are diametrically opposed. Yet it is not just other people's perceptions I wish to overcome in presenting this practice as a continuum. There has been a part of myself that sees the work in the gallery as unimportant politically compared to the protest; a part of myself that believes the safety of the walls of the gallery space represent a retreat from the political arena.

We have not moved on very far from Arendt, who did not conceive of a social or political role for visual art, these most "worldly of all things, works of art," (Arendt, 1958, p.172) fixed firmly within their own rarefied bubble. 'Political art' then was confined to the relational or performative, "the theater is the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art" (Arendt, 1958, p.188). Such a form is then more easily analogous with the Ancient Greek realm she defines as Action and the "so-called agonial spirit, the passionate drive to show one's self in measuring up against others that underlies the concept of politics prevalent in the city-states" (Arendt, 1958, p.194).

How could I claim that the inward-looking concerns of the objects I had been making and brought into the gallery project space were going to make a difference to the world? In truth, as naive as it may sound, the

conversation with the context of the social conditions surrounding the installation: conditions to which the paper-work alludes, and from which the space cannot escape.

Robert Smithson explored through his land art the relationship between "site" and "non-site" (1968), saying "It isn't a question of form or anti-form... but in limits and how these limits destroy themselves and disappear" (Smith and Lipke, 1969). For me such a dissolving of limits is not only in terms of the space, where I refuse to let the gallery project space be abstracted from its wider environment, but in my position in relation to the space and the objects, not allowing myself as an artist to be abstracted from the other roles and responsibilities in my life such as my embeddedness as a mother - which in itself is diffuse and mixed up - or the social conditions in which I am working. This is mirrored in the materials as one piece of text on paper is not allowed to be so distinct from another, none are immune from paint splatter or from being pushed around or out of the space.

The question the feral presents that the formless does not is where this matter has been displaced *from* and where it can go *to* beyond this mixed up state. In so questioning, I thereby also suggest, are we not all in such a state of nomadic entanglement? A state of neither belonging to the current context, but neither being separable from it. Instead, we lurk on the threshold of different contexts.

premise for my PhD project at the outset had been to seek to change things politically, in any small way that I could. Yet whilst the body provides for my objects subject-imprinted-and-removed-matter to create solid form and record experience; it is a medium rather than a motive for the work: the creation and showing of these objects brings an inward landscape of the bodies' organs into an external landscape to complexify for the viewer the navigation between self, other, body, object, inside, outside, and the social that connects them.

In both *Art Riot* and my *Dolph* project, and throughout this doctoral study, my motivation was to assert and defend a symbolic – and physical – space for art in the context of post-recession gentrification and enforced austerity – and explore how it exists within and in excess of the designated structure of the respective environments: geographically, economically, socially, performatively, theoretically. Just as my work falls in a gap that operates in transition between different spheres, one project opens up questions directing the viewer – and the reader of this writing as art practice – back to the other. In so doing I cross-fertilise and intertwine the projects' concerns. The boundaries between the designated social and designated visual spaces are eaten away at. I argue that the moving, social space is no less where the art object may rest than the static, visual space is where the social may rest. **There is no resting place!** Gentrification puts paid to that.

multifarious conflicts

I make the work to bring conflicts to the surface\_\_\_\_\_^^^^^^^ ^^^^^^.

Whether it is the scratching of the inner surface of a sculpture of a bodily organ or the unauthorised installation of objects and text to protest a local pub being turned into a chain supermarket, the drive is to physicalise existing tensions, to actualise the eruptive elements.

In the course of this, I am simultaneously exposing and seeking to protect that which is vulnerable, whether that vulnerability is of myself, of my art objects put

If the  
feral  
belongs  
nowhere,  
must it  
always  
be  
in  
transition?  
A transition  
eluding  
fixity or  
location?  
If so,  
what  
might  
this  
state of  
transition  
reveal?

on the street, or of the place in which they are installed.

Taking trash as treasure, the vacant building as alive, the narrative of value is refused. Organic forms conjoin with inorganic structure - in communication, in attack, in defence - seeking to overthrow the power relation; remind the straight lines that the stinking intestines inside will continue to coil.

Each object may only represent the potential for conflict - in its resemblance to a weapon, for example - yet when hauled together as a group, interacting with internal and external environments, the objects become an occupying mass. It is difficult to resist seeking to give them some order when in a display context: to line them up to attack, defend, explode, sometimes add words in an attempt to give them a voice to provoke the fight. However, even sprawled over my shelves and tables in the studio as storage, they have the quality of creaturely ammunition, storing energy for a future revolt.









How can I capture the feral on the page? How can I write in a feral way whilst seeking to achieve the formal distinction of a PhD – which in itself presents a perplexing framework for an art practice; how we interpret it still seeming subject to negotiation and change. In such terms, it is a contingent framework. Yet it allows the art colleges to continue under the protection of University status; it facilitates protection for me personally by allowing me to pursue a non-commercial, if not anti-commercial, art practice, not least on a practical level through a scholarship; it provides a different form of testing or validating the work; it offers an opportunity to gnaw away at the boundaries of this framework for knowledge.

From the point of view of other frameworks that are imposed on art and that it wrestles against – the gallery space, the museum, the university, the art market – I find the PhD framework useful in seeking to demonstrate art practice not only producing new forms of knowledge recognised within the frame, but those pushing at and spilling beyond, just as the feral falls out of such systems of order, and just as I have wished to use this project to explore why the current political climate may call for studio-based art

In the aftermath of the shock Conservative Party victory in the UK in May 2015, *Art Riot*, my collaborative project with fellow PhD students at Chelsea College of Arts, London, called on artists and art students to bring or perform an artwork on June 20, 2015, starting at the Bank of England, in a gathering and marching of a multitude of artworks as part of an *End Austerity Now* march (The People's Assembly Against Austerity (2017)). Any kind of portable, wearable or performable artwork was acceptable.

In July 2016 I undertook a solo exhibition at Dolph Projects, an independent artist-run exhibition space within an Artists Studio Company (ASC) studio at a former factory in Streatham, South London. In the installation I created, I attempted to unpick – in a further juxtaposition-conflict-continuum – how two competing influences had crossed over when making my recent art objects: firstly my formal practice-based PhD research; and secondly the personal research, material and matter generated and received in relation to my pregnancy, August 2015 childbirth, and early experiences of motherhood, as navigated in and out of the studio.

practice to be brought out of containment in traditional gallery spaces to also infiltrate public, social spaces.

In Jacques Derrida's essay *The Law of Genre* (1992), he discusses the unwritten "law" against mixing genres, whilst asking "What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination?" (p.224). This idea of contamination appeals to me, so that the style and content of the language may corrupt the framework, even when the requirements of the page, the creation of argument, methodology, and referencing are observed. It mirrors my art practice as I am not only taking my art objects outside into social and contentious spaces, I am also seeking to import this outside, this social, this contention into the gallery white cube space, through the objects.

In this text I continuously mix genres and contaminate one style with another; the one disrupting the other on the page. This writing then itself becomes a form of my art practice, in a further mixing of genres, art forms and art spaces, pursuing the thought that it is the feral element of the art practice that prevents it from either belonging to or being limited by a particular space or framework.

The idea for *Art Riot* was generated in the Grosvenor Pub in Pimlico (where else, now that the Student Union bar was closed?) "Let's have an actual riot! With our art!" I said. We all agreed. But how? But when?

Dolph sets a brief for the artists they invite to exhibit, which is primarily:

The artist's objective is to frame an exhibition that contextualises the interests and concerns driving their practice (Dolph Projects, 2017).

However, at this point in my PhD, having spent the best part of three years contextualising my work in terms of agonism, I wanted to explore as much what did not fit within the scope of that prism for looking at the work as what did. An art object is not reducible to one motivation and one motivation only: for the motivation stated there may be another equally true and valid for the subject, the artist, even if it is unknown to them. I then focused on the further instruction that:

We ask artists to share the personal stuff that is often only hidden away as notes to themselves, to share the idiosyncratic thoughts and influences that inform their later propositions. (Dolph Projects, 2017).

We couldn't get it together for May Day. Besides, May Day was just before the 2015 General Election, when all was unknown, something of a lull.

Then suddenly there was all the more reason to take to the streets.

This writing follows a field of practice, as described and advocated by Jane Rendell (2010, p.16) where, "Across the arena of experimental writing, new possibilities are being invented - sometimes autobiographical, often performative, usually both - which question the distanced objectivity of academic writing styles". Rendell addresses the art critic when she says, "although many have written about the spatial potential of writing, fewer have actively exploited its textual and material possibilities, the patterning of words on a page, the design of a page itself - its edges, boundaries, thresholds, surfaces, the relation of one page to another". As an artist working with installation, where the act of installing involves the performance of myself and of objects, experimenting with the layout of the thesis is an opportunity to performatively attack and engage with the page as an environment, treating text and

I consider the fragmentation in my practice - whether installing in the space or here on the page - reflective of both the social and the material circumstances in which I am working. Whilst the "Social-Turn" that Claire Bishop wrote about over a decade ago put it that for "supporters of socially engaged art, the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanize—or at least

de-alienate—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production" (Bishop, 2006, p.179-180), my practice bears similar concerns, without (usually) fitting the bill of offering a recognised "participatory" element. Except I would argue that looking at an artwork, walking around and thinking about it, opens up an important space for a non-committal form of participation with the artwork and with its associated environment - without such a deliberate demand to engage.

Chantal Mouffe states that even traditional art practices in traditional art contexts can be critical, but only writes about relational art practices - the debate she sparked between Bishop (2004) and Liam Gillick (2006) keeping the same focus. Mouffe expresses her "disagree[ment] with the view that 'activism' is the only way in which critical art can exist today" (2013, p.99). However, by proceeding to use the term 'activism' to describe various examples of art she considers to be critical, she cements the establishment of this separate category, which condenses art and activism. Just as Gail Day (2010, p.186) warns of art practices being "marginalized with the tag 'political art'", I worry that the term 'activism' risks all art interpreted as having an activist streak being limited to that singular, instrumentalised purpose, ignoring the fact that the practice may have a multitude of other meanings that do not fit within that purpose.



page as material and space. Mine is not an approach that tears apart the page, any more than I do the physical space of the building, as for example Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural interventions might, but rather echoes Rendell's blurring of boundaries and the use and mis-use of space as intended to question the "*boundaries of bodies and places*" (her italics, Rendell, 2010, p.36), where "Desiring creatures transgress; they resist the logic of architecture" (Rendell, 2010, p.29).

My favourite pub in Pimlico is not operational, I have only ever visited the outside - the boarded up *Balmoral Castle* pub, which earlier in time - later in this thesis - I sought to rescue, temporarily, from its abject state of closure, boarded and scaffolded up since 2006. I idealised it as I tried to imagine where in reality the pub could have been located when it formed the headquarters for the uprising in the film *Passport to Pimlico* (Cornelius, 2006).

*The Grosvenor* seems the next best thing. College staff, Tate staff and office workers are more generally found in *The Morpeth*: it is closer to walk to, more respectable, more expensive. Chelsea College of Art staff institutionalise *The Morpeth* further by calling it "M Block" as an extension of the lettered blocks allocating buildings in college. This in itself makes me want to go elsewhere. *The Grosvenor* is grubby, further along the road, and less professionally run. It offers discounts for students on their average food, and has been known to allow lock-ins until the early hours of the morning. As an MA student I once fell asleep in *The Grosvenor* for two hours without being thrown out.

Conversely, the theory of the social turn establishes a false picture of the kinds of art that do not conform to its criteria. Objects rather than actions appear to be inert, and the viewer as opposed to the participant appears to be passive. Moreover, within the sphere of participation, Bassam El Baroni (2017), draws on Anthony Gardner (2012), to consider the problematics of participatory art practices idealising democracy, whilst Dave Beech (2008) warns of the neutralisation of the "participant" in this form of practice.

My research asks, what if art objects and viewers had a different kind of agency? Without a remit for participation, messages are

passed surreptitiously, under the radar, on the quiet, weaving in and out of comprehensibility.

Are objects not also social – both in their construction and in their circulation? Might metaphor be a way of thinking, through my practice, beyond the constraints of the social turn? Rather than art

What knowledge can I hope to produce through this thesis? Time now squeezed at all ends, bookended by my daughter's nursery hours, exhaustion pulling my output down; whilst the objects and the places I make them keep calling me too. I run to and away from the theory; run to and away from the practice. I run all over but I am not sure what I achieve in this activity.

Yet the non-productivity may be creative too. After all, I do not make this work from a calculated position. Having started the project from a position of antagonism, an antagonism towards the thesis as a product of knowledge may be appropriate; an attack on and resentment of the criteria to be fulfilled.

I work on the written element of the thesis to be done with it, to submit - just as when making objects and installations I keep using up my stored materials until they are gone. Yet once it is submitted then what? Is this position of creative limbo, the shelter and provisions of the college, not preferable to its finitude and the art market and job market that lies beyond?

practice illustratively serving a social cause, can it not also challenge the status quo by allowing us to think differently about our relationships with objects and spaces? As I pick up one object - created from clay, roughly painted, scratched, bodily - and place it with another - an academic, titled book which I have borrowed, fingered, divided and tagged - I conjoin them in the space in an unanticipated relationship with each other and the immediate environment; reaching towards the social circumstances of and surrounding the space, and new possibilities become tangible. Beyond the strategic thought that constructs a political, philosophical argument, is an impulsive thought that arises through action, tactility, sensory response to materials, and through which my own social conditions are imprinted on the forms as I interact with them in the space, piecing together the different elements' own overlapping environments. If the unpredictable, non-linguistic, or only partially linguistic relationships brought about in an artwork can challenge the logic of what constitutes political art, may it be that the harnessed disruption encouraged by Mouffe is missing such a voice?

Bishop made reference to Jacques Rancière but Rancière himself engages with objects in a more promising way, where he speaks of the task of the poet "making society conscious of its own secrets, by leaving the noisy stage of political claims and doctrines" and "delving into the dark underside or the unconscious of a society to decipher the messages engraved in the very flesh of ordinary things" (Rancière, 2010, p.127). Meanwhile, he suggests artistic strategies to

rupture given relations between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated. This might be called the labour of fiction,

If the thesis is not a product then what can it be? A collection of fragments of practice and its documentation: a puzzle I present not as the master who answers how they fit together in seamless smoothness, but to share the position of its jutting edges, gaps, uneven surfaces; a reflection on why a strategy-less strategy may be important.

In the aftermath of the shock Conservative Party victory in the UK in May 2015, the *End Austerity Now* march (The People's Assembly Against Austerity, 2017) presented an opportunity to put our urge for an *Art Riot* into practice. Myself and a small group of fellow PhD students at Chelsea College of Arts, put out a call for other artists and art students to join us and bring or perform an artwork on 20 June 2015, in a gathering and marching of a multitude of artworks as part of this wider march.

Out of the entropic swirl of PhD and pregnancy paperwork, a dedicated roll of paper emerges that expands as my daughter's movement takes up more paper, substantiating her existence and mine through the recording of performance and creation of shape in the space. I transport the roll up a ladder and over the exhibition's partitioning walls, spilling over the white cube, whose threshold I mark with globules of turquoise emulsion. I seek to make a connection with what lies beyond (if only like a schoolchild looking out the window into the 'real' world), directing attention to the mulch-covered skylights overhead: natural material lurking above us.

which, in my view, is a word that we need to re-conceive... It is not a term that designates the imaginary as opposed to the real; it involves the re-framing of the 'real', or the framing of a dissensus... of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective (Rancière, 2010, p.141).

Rancière is somewhat general in leaving open what form his artistic strategies might take. Yet Mouffe and Bishop are too narrow in their specificity. Although Rancière may then appear less clearly empowering of the criticality of art than Bishop and Mouffe; his lack of specificity maintains its promise within the realm of the unfixed.

New materialist Jane Bennett takes such a Rancièrean generality as an opening when she uses his theory of the partition of the sensible outlined in *Disagreement* (1999) to extend it from a social partition to a partition that once dislodged can allow the flow of politically charged objects.

Rancière chooses to define what counts as political by what *effect* is generated: a political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in such a way as to change radically what people can "see": it repartitions the sensible; it overthrows the regime of the perceptible. Here again the political gate is opened enough for nonhumans (dead rats, bottle caps, gadgets, fire, electricity, berries, metal) to slip through, for they also have the power to startle and provoke a gestalt shift in perception: what was trash becomes things,





what was an instrument becomes a participant, what was food-stuff becomes agent, what was adamantine becomes intensity.... It feels dangerous to leave the gate open, for it renders many conceptual, moral, and psychological possessions exposed and vulnerable. It seems safer to figure eruptive events as “argumentative utterances.” (Bennett, 2010, p.106-107)

The metamorphosis of objects and their political potential described by Bennett is very exciting to me. However I would still earmark the role of the imagination and activity of the subject in responding to these objects. There is a thrill in presenting matter as a force on its own, as eruptive as a social riot: yet paying attention to the possibilities presented by objects must operate in tandem with rather than as a replacement for a call for a corresponding social movement.

Writing about the status of broken art works, Bennett emphasises the possibilities offered by the non-art object, or no-longer-art object in contrast to the stereotype of the finished work of art, whereby “The unbroken, esteemed object is encrusted with a thick coat of cultural meanings; the gravely demoted object qua thing allows a glimpse into uncooked material power” (Bennett, 2015, p.104-105). I welcome this challenging of status as I take sordid pleasure in the grey area in my practice in fumbling around with “bits” before, or instead of ever, considering them “artworks”. Yet rebalancing that, one of the opportunities offered by art is to look at objects afresh that might normally be hidden or overlooked, and to offer new conglomerations and transformations of them. This aspect of art practice that is itself anti-hierarchical should not be ignored.

As my style of writing, writing as practice, gravitates towards the poetic, the literary, I use Courier, 12 point, a digital recreation of a typewriter font. This is no stylish move, and although associated in artistic fields with screenplays and draft novels, it is even more basic than Times New Roman. Neither is it intended as a conservative move, despite being weighed down by material in seeking to recreate the experience of reading the word physically hammered onto a page, an object. Traditional as clay, plaster, bronze are traditional, it is a battle to escape from their heritage too. I do not use them traditionally; my materials just aren't very advanced. The everyday, found objects, found spaces I use are entirely contemporary, but it is not an optimistic contemporary: they mourn a social that has passed through them and is getting squeezed out.

In Rosi Braidotti's *Posthuman* (2013) vision of the world, my practice, in conjoining different types of objects, should also be much more embracing of digital technologies. I don't use lights or motors, CGI, 3D printing, anything complicated that needs fabricating, programming. I share her desire for connectedness between species, a horizontal approach to the world; I do not share her optimism that our continuity with technological mediation can bring about "a dif-

Rancière is unimpressed by works of art where objects are presented to speak for themselves. He is particularly disparaging of art installations using readymade objects, in which "by becoming obsolete, unavailable for everyday consumption, any commodity or familiar article becomes available for art, as a body ciphering a history and an object of 'disinterested pleasure'" (Rancière, 2010, p.126). This too is a signal of the agency of the artist-subject communicating with the objects, rather than simply leaving the viewer-subject (as activated by the writer or artist) to perceive them.

Bennett rightly criticises the safety of terming eruptive events as "argumentative utterances" yet it must be kept in mind these are also what she produces in forming the material as argument on the page. This is the problematic outlined by Karen Barad where "materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility" (2003, p.801). We must then rebalance Bennett's limited conception of the art object against her own choice of media - the written word - which is inferred as a superior form of relating to the object than the tactile relation of the "material body of the artist that enables the art", as Janis Jefferies helpfully describes it (Jefferies, 2014). Jefferies goes on to outline a useful key to artistic contribution in this area by saying:

Together in a co-evolutionary sense of being entangled together, material – the stuff itself, the artist's body – come together in the production of work as new knowledge, a way of knowing the world as co-inhabitants of being.



ferent scheme of emancipation and a non-dialectical politics of human liberation" (Braidotti, 2013, p.35).

If the feral represents a state of the subject or object crossing a border between one sphere and another without successfully losing the associations of the first sphere – be it the domestic turning wild, or the wild within the civilised – the feral seems as much about conjoining with the 'old', the 'primitive', as with the new and advanced. It may then include an element that brings us back in the world – a throwback – just as I may throwback my way of thinking from new materialism to Georges Bataille's 'old' – base materialism (Bataille, 1985, pp.20-23 and pp.45-52) – or to aspects of historical materialism – as I still believe the social conditions from which an object is drawn to be as relevant as its inhuman and metamorphic potential. I share Mel Y Chen's concern that the new materialisms do not also become "structural condescensions, themselves new technologies engaged in acts of forgetting, in which lived differences such as race, class, sex and ability no longer serve as necessary considerations because fictions of scale mark them as irrelevant", and echo her commitment to "taking 'old' materialisms as seriously as those heralded to be 'new' ones while resisting the easy categorization of either" (Apter et al., 2016, p.22). After all, would it not be a form of gentrification of knowledge to do otherwise? As I work with scraps, physical leftovers, such a sense of "oldness" lingers, despite the new inventions. This could be mistaken for nostalgia, **melancholy**, as I cling on to objects and spaces that no longer have function, husks of performances that have already played out. Yet to solidify knowledge into form, I cannot agree with buildings of "old" materialism being scrapped, sold for parts, no longer worth scavenging.

**It's not just melancholic, it's angry, abject, violent.** It is not retrogressive if the battles of the past have not yet been won, if a halt needs to be made on relinquishing freedoms, communities we had previously fought for. As I re-use and transform found objects, so I re-use and transform old knowledge.

The ink cartridge is getting empty; I am not going to replace it until it's dry. I am the only one who will read this anyway.

<shake it, reload, you get some more ink out of it>

<<keep on with the cartridge, suck it for all it can give, until it fades to nothing>

We arrived at Bank station underground platform and I sprinted out the door,  
shouting at my husband <<to hurry!>>

as I ran up the stairs.

(Having roped him into filming the event for us,  
we were late for our agreed rioting-meeting-time.)

Out of the station

I raced

through the crowds

to find our

meeting point,

near the Bank of England,

at the corner of Bucklersbury

and Walbrook,

between the Student Bloc and

smaller blocs.

There was no one there.

I put up our black umbrella, bought at a £1 shop,  
on which I had painted with leftover-domestic-house-paint-test-pot-and-brush  
the words <<Art Riot>>.

I looked around anxiously for any of the forty-five who had said they would come. Slowly,  
most of our core group showed up, plus a few interested others - less than ten in total.

Did the gooey ball dropping from my already pregnant belly have any meaning in the crowds as we assembled?

People asked me what this worn artwork meant, but without a defined cause my explanation didn't assist them in pinpointing it: "It relates to the excess that austerity doesn't have room for", I said.

There were so many people around, seemingly itching to get out of the blocks and  
MARCH

as anticipation grew  
in the wait for a cue  
from *End Austerity Now*.

One of our number joined at the meeting point but became so impatient that he had left us

before this waiting period was over.

He found another party to join,  
he preferred to march alone than with us.....

Whilst my practice does not fit with the formats of the social turn, neither can I identify it with art criticism's more recent "object turn" (Frascina, 2014), at its most brutal, where, as Graham Harman says, "object-oriented philosophy holds that objects exist apart from their relations." (Harman, 2016, p.61).

JJ Charlesworth and James Heartfield (2014, p.374) put it that

It is perhaps no coincidence that Rancière's intellectual star has fallen in step with the increasingly dystopian cultural mood that characterises our post-recession era, while object-thinking, in its offer of the extreme negation of subjectivity, provides shelter for those who have finally given up on the world-changing potential of the subject.

This picture is too black and white. I do work with objects, but without negating the subject. My practice works with the materiality we are left with in this dystopian climate, materiality that I have scavenged. Yet I am not removed from it, and neither is my social context.

I still ask: what can I make with this?

And at the same time: how do we proceed, socially, from here?

.....

"1819 J. Wilson *Compl. Dict. Astrol.* The [moon] is also said to be feral, when she is void of course, having separated from a planet, and applying to no other." (Anon, 2017(a))



Braidotti says that “Creativity and critique proceed together in the quest for affirmative alternatives which rest on a non-linear vision of memory as imagination, creation as becoming” (2013, p.165). To follow the logic of such a vision – we must surely find value in going backwards just as in going forwards. I am not writing from the beginning, but from the middle, towards the end, and somewhere beyond the start. I present the problems with the original premise before even presenting that premise.

As I deal with buildings being repurposed by developers for luxurious new ends, my work is distinctly unglamorous, anti-aesthetic. So I had thought I had no investment in the font on the page as artistic expression, that it is merely a means to an end, chosen in the expediency of what is simple, what is at hand, as with my sculpture materials.

However, I realise there is still some aesthetic choice, when I reflect how much I prefer Mary Kelly’s typewritten notes in *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79) to the sickly-sweet, computer-generated handwriting-style font employed in her *Love Songs: Multi-Story House* (2007), albeit its sharing of personal thoughts and break-

I was reminded of prior rolls of paper I had made drawings on and ripped apart during pregnancy, along with some smaller sketches. Re-finding these stored avenues of thought in my studio, I decided to bring them to the Dolph space too as they represented another, hidden side of my practice that is softer, less aggressive than the objects, though relating to the same subject matter of my imagined insides.

There is a violence in the womb sculptures on top of the upturned drawers: one red, shiny, a gleaming organ, bare inside, scratched in the damage I fantasized my daughter would do to my body in childbirth. I took masochistic pleasure in acting out her imagined antagonism towards me, my body her environment, likening her primal urge to individuate to my refusal of the purchased ownership, control and takeover of external buildings and environments that I believe should be common. This vision of individual anarchism then remains social, conjoined in my body, speaking to the “fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are, from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own” (Judith Butler, 2006, p.28).







ing up of text into the window panes of a greenhouse spatialises text, which is in some way what I am seeking to do with the architectural space of this page.

I am frustrated how obedient Kelly is with her text and her objects in following the lines of the frames, perhaps mirroring my own frustration with the guidelines and margins I must follow in laying out the text here. What would I do differently in her physical space? Seek to overspill the borders? Or highlight the borders set by authority as a means of contending them? Perhaps that is what I am doing here in taking the margins to their limits; in skewing the orientation. For what purpose? To disobey the terms of others that are overly conservative, that gentrify space, art, and thought; instead setting one's own terms with the space.

Rendell's provocative oversimplification that "In patriarchy men own women and space" (2010, p.30) - a provocation I will unravel later in this text - increases my frustration that Kelly, "the mother of all feminist artists" (Fowler, 2015), does not challenge these boundaries either by breaking through or demonstrating a tension with them.

My attachment to old things, old spaces, their correspondence with my social concerns, shares more with

I use the lighter Courier New as a more hesitant, personal, reflective voice.

Sometimes I wonder whether the knowledge this introduces is

<out of place>

in an academic thesis.

Yet it shares more intimately my experience of the making and thought processes that contribute to creating this project, so here it feeds in as a third layer, a layer so light you could ignore it (perhaps I hope you do).

This is the layer of me that actually did use a digital typewriter as a 17 year old, not because it was cool or hipsterish to do so at the turn of the millennium, but because it was cheap and accessible compared to a computer.

I used it to write poems, playing with layout, influenced by E. E. Cummings, where the creation of shape, of meaning, on the page was restricted to

t y p i n g l e t t e r s .

the practice of Suzanne Lacy, another feminist artist reaching prominence in the 1970s. This resonance might be seen in *Inevitable Associations* (1976) – where she performed as an old woman in an LA hotel lobby to draw a parallel between the cleaning up of the exterior of this old hotel and the beauty judgements against, and ageing of, women. It is not just about the space, it is about the social abjected from that space. It is not just about the social, it is about a feminist position within that social.

I will stop to compare my recycling bag - latex – football composite dress with Louise Bourgeois' wearable latex sculpture *Avenza* (1968-1969). The quality of the latex skin of the artworks becoming the extended skin of the wearer, in both cases physically playing out Judith Butler's message that "Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies." (Butler, 2006, p.20). However, the political constitution of the respective works is very different. *Avenza*, with its multiple breasts, commented on the sexual body, paraded as the sculpture was in a mock up fashion show event, *Confrontation* (Dover, 2014). Mine, in an anti-austerity march, contributed to and confronted protest: wishing to reject austerity politics' intrusion on art and, in parallel, keeping a further layer of meaning, like the contents of my pregnant belly beneath it, internal to the work: seeking to avoid the artwork being reduced to "giving a voice" to our own interest group as in Mouffe (2007, p.5). The incorporation of found materials spoke of the reproductive body, life's products that cannot be economised on, continuing despite this imposed austerity, as I contend the meaning of the artwork must do. There is a subject in the object of my *Art Riot* costume, and another subject inside me: the excess is not just matter, but its animation, projection and extension through the moving flesh of the

This implies writing in a naïve way; bold enough to put forward an idea, but unknowing in terms of rules, regulations, theories and frameworks. This is the layer of me that missed out on studying an undergraduate degree, that didn't go to University until over a decade later. The layer of me that will never be canny enough to be on the cutting edge of innovative, on-trend art practice.

A  
|  
stick  
|  
in  
— — — — —  
the  
|  
mud

"1659 D. Pell Πελαγος 213 It is impossible to reduce this feral creature" (Anon, 2017(b)).

The mud that puddles, the mud that pulls you down, the mud that swallows your smart phone. The mud of the building site where the community building got flattened to be turned into luxury flats.

social beings within it.

Meanwhile, stripping the body to its insides removes the civilising, separating skin that hides all the rude functionality/dysfunctionality beneath, whilst sharing with *Avenza* the property of covering the wearer with an object of greater bodily exposure.

Conversely, I acknowledge that Chelsea College of Arts accepted me for my Post-graduate Diploma in Fine Art (2010) on the basis of my self-taught portfolio, which in turn facilitated further study. So value can still be found in the bits, the people, of which I was one, that fall

between the standard ridges and avenues set out for us.

For better or worse, this is not a typewriter, directly creating the physical text on paper, text you can't erase. Which may have been better for committing to the project, but worse for expediency if you have to re-do the whole thing. Your stream of consciousness flows to the fingers, you hit enter, and crossings-out can be manually corrected, but the Tipp-Ex still shows and the over-typing doesn't line up. Or you embrace the mistakes as I sometimes do in my objects, like where a hole has blown in a metal cast and I do not refill it.

This is not a sculpture,  
neither, yet  
this unknowing voice reflects that of making a tactile piece of work, which is not according to a definitive plan, theory or design, but out of an urgency to act, to physically create a thing outside of myself, to substantiate a connection to the world through matter operating on a different level to rationalising arguments. A more reflective and personal style of writing then may provide a better bridge to this unknowing voice of the practice, probing its fog through more experimental formulations of words, more tentatively unravelling its difference.

I have hardly slept, I am repeatedly full of my daughter's nursery viruses - the nursery where half of my scholarship money is spent in order that I can write this - but the words on the page blur together and read like nonsense. How can I edit this chapter today; write the

academic argument? I cannot do it. Instead, I can mix up and manipulate a piece of salt-dough and mark it with scratches and bite-marks mimicking my daughter's interaction with my body.

It is an entirely different but valid engagement with thought.

What did it mean that I had physically scrapped my previous piece of PhD writing as drawing matter and turned it into this swirling mess, ready to be set alight? Had I failed to deliver on its premise for critical art as challenged by Mouffe?

Specifically, this had been to develop the application of my practice in external interventions in a form of art-as-public-dissensus, and the theoretical focus around Chantal Mouffe's agonism and what she determined to be "critical" art practices:

From the point of view of the theory of hegemony, artistic practices play a role in the constitution and maintenance of a given symbolic order, or in its challenging, and this is why they necessarily have a political dimension (2013, p.91).

And here I was in a white cube gallery space surrounded not by challenging slogans, but by drawings and sculptures related to my body and the birth of my daughter.

Alternatively, perhaps it was neither a total failure, nor a case of needing to scrap it entirely, but rather my way of saying that the clarity of Mouffe's premise needed to be mixed up: the methodology I had built upon it now had to be recycled for an alternative use: the words becoming chewed up and digested by the practice, drawn into the installation.

The loosening of my attachment to agonism – in all its rationality and straightforwardness – is what would herald a return to an earlier interest in the less defined position of the feral – which seemed to offer a richer landscape for my work but a harder one to navigate by theory. Whilst I have dug further to find artists, thinkers, political groups and publications naming themselves as "feral", what this means to each one covers disparate ground compared to the focused, if restrictive, arguments of agonism.

Kenneth Clarke's reference to a "feral underclass" (Clarke, 2011) struck me as a verbal act of dehumanisation of the rioters, of that conflict, keeping at bay the question of what had made these looting rioters so violent, so greedy. It crystallised for me the utter separateness and superiority by which he as a representative of the austerity Government viewed himself compared to these 'other' human beings: people "cut off from the mainstream in everything but its materialism". Yet what else does the mainstream – and his Government – offer except this materialism?

Whereas Halberstam characterises Slavoj Žižek's article on the London riots as "making it seem as if the rioters were just mall-rats on a consumer rampage" (Halberstam, 2012, p. 135), Žižek says he does find "a moment of genuine protest, in the form of an ironic response to consumerist ideology: 'You call on us to consume while simulta-

The printed text was not treated as sacred, but activated by the interaction with and contamination of it, brought into non-linguistic communication with other elements through layering, drawing, messing up of the paper and any text and previous drawings on it.

The antenatal class notes and National Health Service literature could likewise be seen as a plan, imposed externally, seeking to manage and control the forthcoming eruption of birth, only to be cast aside in the materiality and performance of the event: both of the birth itself and this installation.

Likewise, mixing up its premise: the challenging of a given symbolic order may be one of the political dimensions of artistic practice, but it is not the only one. In parallel, Julia Kristeva talks of the bridging role of the art object to the self. She seeks to redefine revolt, bringing it back to the revolt of the individual and the argument that “... to think is to revolt, to be in the movement of meaning and not the movement of the streets” (2002, p.38).

The role Mouffe provides for contemporary art in mounting a challenge implies a dialogue between parties, whereby antagonism is secondary to agonism. At first I accepted this, after all, agonism proposes to mitigate the physical violence of antagonism, and surely art was then closer to a form of agonism? However, I had a nagging doubt that the art I was making was not really following the form she had in mind. As the project developed I started to wonder if this might be a sign of the restrictiveness of the theory rather than the insufficiency of my practice to articulate its concerns in order to fit with it.

neously depriving us of the means to do it properly – so here we are doing it the only way we can!” (Žižek, 2011). However, Žižek speedily glosses over the riots’ origins in the police’s fatal shooting of Mark Duggan, an unarmed multiracial suspect, whose death Nina Power (2011) emphasises was “another tragic event in a longer history of the Metropolitan police’s treatment of ordinary Londoners, especially those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and the singling out of specific areas and individuals for monitoring, stop and search and daily harassment”. Žižek tempers reading any meaning into the London riots, comparing them to the end of the 2011 Egyptian revolution; still concluding “one should also avoid the temptation of the narcissism of the lost cause: it’s too easy to admire the sublime beauty of uprisings doomed to fail” (Žižek, 2011). Halberstam counters (2012, p. 135) that Žižek “anticipates co-optation and often even helps it along”.

My will to bring out conflicts contains no great vision of success, but neither does it of failure: the objects have no more articulated cause to fail at than did Clarke’s underclass. As Joshua Clover says, (2016, p.83) “No one knows what the riot wants. It wants nothing but its own disorder, its bright opacity. Glints and shards of shattered glass.” Yet he also indicates how this apparent lack of motive becomes racialised, “The purportedly thoughtless and natural character of riot, lacking reason, organization, and political mediation, is aligned with the racist tradition wherein racialized subjects are figured as natural, animalistic, irrational, immediate” (2016, p.112). Clarke animalises and arguably racialises his rioters further in his use of the word “feral”, howsoever this may extend to white people who also fall outside his civilised





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violence (F)





Meanwhile wallpaper samples I had previously collected when thinking of decorating my daughter's nursery lay another claim on the Dolph Project gallery territory, domesticating the space with these scraps that didn't make it into my actual domestic environment. They are expanded upon with rejected, left-over house paint samples in varying states of decay, which I use to drip around and mix the different parts of the installation together: liquid waste matter that I want to use up somehow, so bring it to the space: swishing it around, throwing it at the walls, leading the drips back to a central imagined ignition point, which the emptied paint pots feed into it as fuel for a fire.

The rejected, nomadic domestic is further solidified in the nappy sculptures, which record the daily performance of changing my daughter's nappies in the studio. The feral animal scavenges waste and makes use of it: the urban fox eating from the trash. The domestic animal too when given half the chance: my old dog going crazy to lick up fox shit.

class, whether through criminality, racist violence, or mere unemployment. In evoking an underclass that segregates us, its white subjects may then be taken as contemporary examples of "the manifold contradictions in imperial hierarchy - not only with respect to the Irish but also to the other 'white negroes' - Jews, prostitutes, the working-class, domestic workers, and so on" (McClintock, 1995, quoted in Chen, 2012, p.113).

In aligning my art practice with the "feral" it is not to claim the identity of the rioters; to produce a noble savage; or to give a causeless fight a cause. Rather it expresses my own violence.

One of the most feral aspects of Mouffe's agonism is her insistence that agonistic struggle is not about disputing the ethics of those in power, but rather of "unsettling the dominant hegemony" (Mouffe, 2013, p.91). I am not fully convinced of this position as a considered political strategy, as why would we seek to dispute a hegemony if we had no disagreement with its ethics? However, I think the feral, when considered at a universally animalistic level rather than a derogatory class, shares this quality of acting for its own sake rather than out of any higher cause. Clover similarly warns "There is a risk in inviting in that moral framework" to discussions around riot (Clover to Power, 2016, 1:12:53).

David Harvey (2011) pointed out at the time of the London riots, there can also be described a feral capitalism from Thatcher through to the present day, rampantly exploited by those in power. The feral that doctors its expenses is also provisional, is also improper, is also driven by a

sense of deprivation from the dehumanising impositions of capitalism. It scavenges what is there, it plays it fast and loose, but the feral has to be lucky, it sometimes gets caught short. Donald Trump and his ruralised, white supporters have too been named feral (Moyers, 2017).

Derrida has said, “sharing this common being-outside-the-law, beast, criminal, and sovereign have a troubling resemblance: they call on each other and recall each other, from one to the other” (Derrida, 2009, p.17). To the extent that this resemblance has echoes of the feral, the feral cannot be a moral position. The feelings of deprivation of the social group designated by Clarke are where I identify as an artist, but out of a shared sense of precariousness rather than of self-righteousness.

Yet mine is not a luxurious feral of a Paul McCarthy silver butt plug, the feral possession of a Derridean king, where the errant object is now also a trophy. When luxurious materials enter into my practice - cast bronze, aluminium - they are tapped for all they are worth: plants are crystallised in death as they are cremated, and molten metal deluges their vacancy: this is my desperation, not willing to let the living thing go. The desperation that strikes me: I can't be sitting here all day writing this! I need to go make work in the college foundry, before that time runs out, before my access to those materials is withdrawn, before I am cast out to fend for myself and solicit my own materials again. The output of the thesis - at its most academic - is the fulfilment of the scholarship, whilst the output of the objects is <mine>, I get to keep them, secret treasure, even if it looks like trash. I build up my arsenal of inarticulate creatures, as I indulge my dirty habit of making.

Then as the poetic and the personal infiltrate the page, the thesis becomes co r r o d

e d

into another form of practice, an installation for me to lay claim to, for me to

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fragment in this trash/
```

treasure

entanglement:

it up;

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building>>>>>>>>>>
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[illegible]

scraping it back.







Waste finds new value in the subject's interaction with it, and the nappies are transformed from waste objects into life objects, thickly and tentatively touching themselves, squirming about, reaching with their tab-hands towards their curled in undersides. Poured latex faeces wrestle against the white enclosure, primarily contained - as is the art object in the white cube - but some seeping out at the sides, ready to contaminate.

"1621 R. Burton  
*Anat. Melancholy* i. i. ii.  
xi. 45  
Thence come..vitious  
Habits,..  
ferall Diseases."

(Anon, 2017(a))

Finally we walked.

We walked and talked.

We took photos of each other  
and interesting people and  
signs we saw along the way.

People in buildings  
along the route  
poked their heads out of the windows  
and doorways  
to have a look,  
some to cheer us on.

The turnout was good but there were  
still gaps between people in the  
crowd. We did not move as a solid ob-  
ject but a loose mass of individuals  
held together in forward movement.

My theory books become makeshift supports for the nappy sculptures to sit on, building and layering meaning beneath them as I physically pile them up to build shape in the space, replicating the real, shifting plinths of my everyday clutter rather than constructing separate, white pedestals that might divorce the singular object from its context, an individual in the dock, removed from its gang. The books are also transitional spaces, in the mental avenues they open up, and in their physical movement between the academic, art-marking and domestic spaces, now the exhibition space. Each one might support a different meaning for the nappy above it.

I reflect on the nappy objects through Clover's ideas on riot, as I try to connect my protest practice with that in the gallery. Clover highlights the linkage between struggles over reproductive labour and riot, and points to "riot as a necessary relationship with the current structure of state and capital, waged by the abject - by those excluded from productivity" (Clover, 2016, p.47). This makes me think of the transformation of the abject in my objects, and the social that I find within the bodily, as also being a recording of my own position at the time that I made them,

on maternity leave from doctoral study and not wishing my own position to be just that of the nappy-changer, but to remake them as an artist

too: my impulse to act here doubling but reclaiming the form of the labour. The act affirms that the one form of labour, the one form of creativity, does not preclude the other, as artist-celebrities Marina Abramović (Puglise, 2016) and Tracey Emin (Alexander, 2014) have continued to suggest, thereby playing out the concerns of Kristeva that:

Since the moment of Simone de Beauvoir and her circle, there has been an insistence on the necessity for women to claim their sexual freedom, which often involved a rejection of motherhood... This trend, however, suspended many critical issues. For instance, we were unable to rethink the working norms of civilisation and culture around motherhood, for it seemed as if the pleasures and the desires as well as the social regulations figured by the concept of the mother in the home - *la mère au foyer* - were null and without future significance. For this reason the vast majority of women were unmoved by the feminist movement... (Kristeva, 1996, quoted in Pollock, 1998, p.38).

On the one hand, the feral says “make do with what you have”, scavenging like Agnès Varda’s gleaners. On the other hand, when the object to be scavenged is the wrong side of a wall or a piece of glass, might it not also say “steal what you can”, whether physically or figuratively, like *The Undercommons*, where

it cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can. To abuse its hospitality, to spite its mission, to join its refugee colony, its gypsy encampment, to be in but not of (Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, 2013, p.26).

My acknowledgement of motherhood within my artistic practice, highlighting rather than hiding its presence, follows a feminist politics of the personal with the same object-form-subject-matter as Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79). The nappy is not a value object in the sense of being priced up for sale, but in my own value and satisfaction being bound up with taking care of my daughter; and its metamorphosis as art object. However, my approach is very different to Kelly’s.

Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (Nixon et al, 2016) compares *Post-Partum Document* to Agnès Varda’s *The Gleaners and I* (2009), for its transformation of material: a cultural lineage of collecting, and recycling materials, and the valueless things that women value. I draw inspiration from this “feminist approach” where “gleaning offers a trope for women’s cultural marginality”. Moreover, Mulvey says that gleaning gives meaning to the rejects of the harvest, which I would suggest makes gleaning a feral practice as it scavenges for use what is otherwise left as waste. Yet I would argue that Kelly’s extensive dissection of what she collects through language removes it from the animalistic compulsion – to eat, to store, to survive – of the gleaner making do, including the contemporary gleaners depicted in Varda’s film who live hand to mouth, whether from the fields around travellers’ sites or picking out rejected produce in urban food markets and bins. The transformation into an artwork is curated, as what is collected is framed by glass, dates, measurements, and analysed and reflected upon

Developing the strand of thought that the feral is deprived, if through *The Undercommons* there is an idea that stealing to feed such a deprivation can be a creative act – to steal ideas and take them away from the institution – then my only question is: where to take them? As I pick up and store old pieces of knowledge others have left behind, like the debris that I make a sculpture with, the gathering is an unordered form of storing, to be recycled and transformed. I do not know what they will turn into until I start to put them together with other things; I will not know where they can go until a place comes up that these germinating objects and ideas can find a relation with.

My reversion to traditional art materials could be seen as retrogressive compared to Kelly's shocking introduction of real faecal matter in the 1970s. Yet is it really so shocking? The dirty linen of the nappy liner, solid excrement removed, is hygienically preserved like a medical specimen. It creates a historical record of the subject's interaction with an object – where it is fixed in time. In my nappy sculptures it is not only the literal object I am asking the viewer to look at: I am equally interested in what the object might be imagined to be. Just as something is always added, taken away, changed from the original object – in this case recreated from scratch in clay – the potential for further transformation is also invoked – as if the solid matter becomes a living creature like the baby that wore it, that excreted its presence. It is an object transformed by the subject, that then becomes a subject with a form of agency itself. It is an object that represents a moment of possibility – past, present, future – rather than being placed at a particular moment.

through Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. Dried and sealed, no sloppy stew will be cooked from this gleaner's finds.

Mulvey (2016) defends Kelly's practice of producing

out of a rag-bag of stuff, supremely elegant and finished works. But the perfect surfaces characteristic of her exhibitions do not close off the processes that lie behind them. Rather, original objects are framed and displayed in such a way that their 'object-hood' survives enhanced rather than diminished, enabling the significance that Kelly had first noticed to be exhibited to the spectator.

However, only some parts of the composite objects of Kelly's nappies survive, and when flattened out to be hung on a wall I would question the sense of 'object-hood' – of an object that is three dimensional, tactile and in this case perishable – that is lost by this. Moreover, in aesthetic terms, one of the key points in Varda's film is the ludicrousness of the waste created in modern food production because of fruit or vegetables being seen as too small, too big, too ugly, and the social consequence of the systems that preserve this aesthetic standard. I am not convinced that the "perfect surfaces" of Kelly's work are equivalent to Varda's rebellious celebration of misfits; which she mirrors by allowing mistakes in filming to enter into the final edit, such as "the dance of the lens cap" (2009, 0:46:50) when she forgot to turn the camera off and left it dangling.

Reading Harney and Moten's articulation of the gypsy en-



Conversely, I would defend Kelly against the reductive description of her work put forward by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (2012, p.4). They draw on a quote from Kelly to assist them in giving a very narrow interpretation of the Modernist concept of “truth to materials”, linking it to the notions of the artist’s genius and Kantian taste, despite drawing their secondary quotation of Roger Fry, the art critic who coined the term, from a Susan Hiller (2015) essay on the sculptor Henry Moore that revealed that Moore - who has been seen to typify this reductivist and disciplinary sense of purity in his use of media - was in fact far less prescriptive in his approach to materials than has commonly been understood by this term. Barrett and Bolt go on to draw on a quote from Griselda Pollock, not to elaborate and complexify the work of Kelly, but ultimately to group their feminist historical materialism as stuck in a textual politics whereby art’s “very materiality has disappeared into the textual, the linguistic and the discursive... There is nothing outside of discourse and language is its vehicle” (2012, p.4). This does a disservice to both Pollock and Kelly. Whilst the shit may have been removed from Kelly’s nappy liners, her typed analysis of the contents appear to me more as tea-leaf readings, as she examines the entrails to measure her child’s performance and in turn her own in feeding him. The fact that the physical substance eludes the frame speaks to a material that does similarly, which still gives space to its agency.

campment chimed with me very strongly and brought me back to the first piece of work I made on commencing the PhD - a makeshift fort between Chelsea College of Arts’ bike racks and Tate Britain, demarcating space that I identified as being between but independent of both institutions.

The objects I brought in to camp around the space resembled theatrical weapons such as a catapult, a lasso, a detonator, a pointy umbrella. They were imagined to have fallen in excess of the institution and formed together of their own will outside. In fact, as research students are not given studio space at college, they were in reality in excess of the space, as I had no place to otherwise camp my objects.

When I made the work I positioned it in terms of agonism, and respected adversaries: an adversarial relationship between institutions and myself, as I sheltered under one, between both, but was not fully incorporated into either. The presence of the second institution and second tension around its space rightly complexifies the particular position of the art student beyond the single patriarchy of Harney and Moten’s university. After all, the academic institution, despite its increasing cost to the student and layers of management and bureaucracy, *can* (but does not always) act as a place of enlightenment against the established, commercial art market and its different set of restrictions.











Kelly's more recent work printing text on lint - produced from hundreds of domestic tumble dryer cycles - speaks similarly to this tenuous relationship between language and matter, whereby communication is only partial. Lint being a leftover, waste matter, caught between cloth, water, air and heat might then also be thought of as feral in its activity; in being out of place, but with no place to go. To use it to form barely-there text does not rid it of this materiality.

It is disappointing that in a book setting out to show what art has to offer to new materialist theory, object-based practice barely appears, and sculpture, this most material of art practices, involving direct, non-linguistic contact with the physical, evidential things with which we are left in the world, is still being posited as seeking to dominate rather than learn from the material.

crossed the line into politics to stand against Michael Gove as an MP to defend art in education, whether that performance became his art practice, or whether it was the point at which the art practice was relinquished at the door of the political terrain he sought to influence.

The bike rack as a choice of location was indicative of not confronting an issue head on, but choosing to

slink around the skirting boards of the institute, claiming ground no one else would want. It has connotations of the

school bike shed - somewhere school kids go

for illicit activity

Staged during Tate Britain's *Art Under Attack* exhibition (2013-2014), my installation contained text that asks a direct question, "What other attacks on art?", leaving the viewer to consider what attacks are not framed by this exhibition on the history of physical attacks on art. It also coincided with the weekend of Tate Britain holding what they called a "House Warming" party to celebrate their rearranged collection; as well as the Art Party Conference (2013) organised by Bob and Roberta Smith in Scarborough, which I attend with others from the University of the Arts London's Students' Union ("SUARTS"). I wanted this small occupied space that I left behind in London to be a gesture to demarcate ground for art falling outside of any of these parties and institutions, however good their intentions.

I cannot help but wonder, when Patrick Brill, the artist known as Bob and Roberta Smith, later (Curtis, 2015)

like smoking cigarettes; snogging each other.









TATE BRITAIN



The objects – made of an assortment of packaging, twisted branches, a pair of antlers, dried out plants, conkers, polystyrene, papier-mâché, bits of plastic and things from the £1 shop – are all tied on in such a provisional way with visible rope or string, a bit of gaffa tape for extra security, as if to evoke the vulnerability of a real gypsy encampment – which may be anti-establishment in its activity but whose occupants must also survive. Taking place in midwinter, I had visions that all it would take would be a gusty gale and the objects would be gone – like Kensington and Chelsea Council may soon try to vanish the gypsies who live near me in JG Ballard's *Concrete Island* (2014) under the Westway near Latimer Road (Bonsall, 2008), in favour of flashy sports facilities (Goolistan, 2016); and like the fluttery education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children who are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school in the UK than children of any other ethnicity (Goddard, 2017). The liability to fly about likewise gave the objects the potential for danger if they hit someone: the vulnerable are identified as a threat.

Whilst the health and safety checks had been passed and the work had been authorised, the content had been kept hazy, unclear; I had not been explicit in saying what the text would be.

There was still then a feeling of acting in an unauthorised way when I put up this authorised work, staying on the look out for college security guards prowling around who might identify my mischief. Can they see what I'm up to? Are there cameras around this side of the building?

It felt risky also to be making such a statement opposite the bomb-damaged walls of the Tate, to draw such an outrageous parallel between the political, primarily economic, attacks on art now and the life threatening, Nazi attacks of War that caused the damage to the building.

Beyond the logistics of dealing with human waste items, the original nappies felt too personal, too close to my daughter for me to use as they were. It would have felt like a betrayal to put them on display as they were, to potentially become objects of denigration or ridicule. The bonds of love and care I felt for my child resonated through the actions associated with the objects of her existence, including these nappies, and I was concerned such associations would be lost in a readymade. Whilst Kelly communicated such through labelling and narrative, I wanted to communicate it at a more animalistic level. As I recreated them in a different material, I wanted the elaboration of shapes, colour

and movement to simultaneously imbue the objects with the associations of a life in and around the object, whilst protecting the subject from direct exploitation - by myself - of her own infant waste.

I feel that it can be too easy to use original bodily material as a short-cut to gaining a response from the viewer. Sometimes, this is merely disappointing, as in Helen Chadwick's *Piss Flowers* (1991-1992) where the title and process promise more than the end product. The woman's body in movement is used as both functional and fun material to make the art work. Here the shape is allowed to be formed by the body in its interaction with an outside environment, but the dirty-pure exhilaration and titillation of urinating in the snow is fixed into a boring, clean, decorative and plastic-looking item. Whilst the resultant items may, importantly, have opened up a new means of distribution of the gendered performance, it makes the bodily matter itself seem almost irrelevant. Conversely, her jewel-like, deathly fixing of embryos in works such as *Monstrance* (1996) knowingly utilises her own artistic exploitation of bodily matter to contribute to feminist discourse on the implications of the preciousness of the embryo-as-image for women's reproductive rights (Franklin, 1999, p.73-78).

Marc Quinn's portrait sculpture *Lucas* (2001) goes beyond disappointment in terms of the promise of materials, forced into a display of sheer patriarchal will, destroying the unfamiliar placental form, to be forced into the male known. Although I believe Barrett and Bolt's take on "truth to materials" unfairly characterises the dominance of the sculptor over materials – ignoring what knowledge a sculptor can share through working directly with materials compared to speculating about them in words – in this case I think a complex and perhaps unknowable truth has been denied in favour of producing a defined object. Quinn moulded his newborn son's head at 3 days' old (May, 2006, p.368) and filled it with the liquidised placenta from the child's birth.

Do not get me wrong, in the hallucinatory moments after the birth of my daughter I wanted to keep the placenta, thinking about trying to cast it into metal - this weird transitional object between myself and my daughter that I couldn't quite look at directly but was captured by: a source of nourishment, now waste, almost an entity in itself. However, after a day of our placenta hanging around in the hospital fridge annoying the staff I abandoned such fetishization and let the midwife throw it out. The placenta is not the child, the nappy is not the child; rather they are part-object, part environment, husks that the child has utilised and moved on from.

In my use of clay, womb sculptures and nappy sculptures morph into one another, as organ becomes waste and waste becomes organ; layered in coloured liquids of a seeping bodily - not necessarily one's own. It seems Quinn had planned his placenta sculpture rather more carefully; I speculate that he had his assistants and equipment tee'd up to collect it before the birth. It does not translate as a spontaneous piece. The approach of morbidly, publically fixing the organ to the identified child makes me all the more uncomfortable, as the patriarchal lineage em-







bodied in the head of the son follows the series of blood heads the father had made of himself. It also vanishes the mother in the equation, the other subject this object had been a part of, she who had housed it for so long. It seems to play out a scenario described in feminist artist and theorist Barbara Ettinger's deliberations on the prenatal, uterine "borderspace" between mother and child (2006, p.180) whereby

the womb can appear in culture only as psychosis; i.e., that it can only be the signifier for the unthinkable par excellence, with that whatever is thinkable has to pass through the castration mechanism, by which it is separated from its Real-ness, making the womb that which must be rejected as the ultimate abject, and making this abject the necessary condition for the creation of the subject and the psychoanalytic process. It is precisely this mechanism that establishes the mother as an object or a lack, sacrificed to the creation of meaning and to the meaning of creation, whose elimination is the basis for the creative process and the Birth of the Hero.

Further, comparing the work to Quinn's fourth plinth sculpture of a disabled pregnant woman, Marianne May (2006, p.372) notes, "Like Lucas, Alison Lapper (8 months) is suspended in a fixed moment, the icy marble as closed off and removed from the context it supposedly signifies as the frozen chamber in which the form of the baby's head floats". Movement and agency are denied of the child-bearing woman, just as Ettinger says she is denied from the realm of the artist genius (2006, p.175).

The agency and movement of the placenta is also social, like the woman and like the womb. However, it lies between identities, and thereby acts beyond the maternally-specific; it cannot be claimed as part of a normative female identity either. This is confirmed scientifically by Hélène Rouch in her interview with feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, notwithstanding the latter's focus on the recognition of sexual difference:

... there's a commonly held view that the placenta is a mixed formation, half maternal, half-fetal. However, although the placenta is a formation of the embryo, it behaves like an organ that is practically independent of it. It plays a mediating role on two levels. On the one hand, it's the mediating space between mother and fetus, which means that there's never a fusion of maternal and embryonic tissues. On the other hand, it constitutes a system regulating exchanges between the two organisms (Irigaray, 2013, pp.38-39).

The same month as *Art Riot*, and similarly responding to the shock 2015 General Election results, my performative work *Bad Mummy* centred around a humongous, oversized, imagined placenta formed from salt dough.

Staged in a small project space room within Chelsea College of Arts as part of a feminist exhibition of five current and past MA Fine Art students (Cronin, 2015), I attempted to draw together a bodily allusion to the formless with agonistic politics, whilst acknowledging an incommunicability between the two. If I can now articulate that in-between-ness as feral, both *Bad Mummy* and *Art Riot* were precursors to this revelatory shift, as through these works I confronted the limits of the Bataillean reading of agonism I had adopted up to this point. It had been useful for me when forming my project to draw on the provocative antagonism in George Bataille's work to explore the crossover between art and politics; and to find support in his writing on the limitations

What Quinn's process then further removes is the transitional, perishable strangeness of the internal object itself - an organ for communicating matter between two subjects, which is independent of the gender of either.

of political philosophy, as I aligned the art object with a base materialism that may act beyond those limits, where "certain plastic representations are the expression of an intransigent materialism, of a recourse to everything that compromises the

powers that be in matters of form, ridiculing the traditional entities" (Bataille, 1985, p. 51). However, ultimately the strategy fudged — in lumpen discoloured clumps, squished into the gaps in the teeth of the speaker — the divide between dialogue and matter, and the limits of agonism itself.

I reused a DIY Conservative Party megaphone that earlier in time, later in this thesis, appeared in my *Damaging Objects* (2014) exhibition, but it now took up a pedestal and became a mouthpiece for a series of recordings of Margaret Thatcher speeches and interviews. The pieces selected ranged from a 1976 address in which she refers to herself as the Iron Lady, to her last Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons, to an interview about working mothers on *Women's Hour* — that later became the soundtrack to my *Mother's Milk* (2016) video made for the Dolph installation.

In parallel and responding to this bombardment of Thatcher rants in my performance, I sat in the centre rectangle of a Matisse-like star of grey carpet offcuts that both softened and cut through the white room. Two uterine forms in brown and green wax sat on the room's whited-out fireplace mantelpiece — an architectural residue of a prior purpose for the building — latex skin hanging off them. Over the course of the 45-minute performance I kneaded together a 30-kilo ball of salt dough which, not attaching properly to my exposed pregnant belly's tummy button as planned, quickly fell off; the improvised umbilical cord detaching. Acting out the role of agonistic 'active' matter, Kleinian individuating foetus and embryonic mother inheriting a Thatcherist narrative. This narrator may be female, but her patriarchal approach has "no time for the feminist movement" (Holehouse, 2013). I then from my carpeted position proceeded to throw the salt dough in handful after handful at the walls, the ceiling, through the windows, whilst the audience scattered and Thatcher's tannoy continued. Finally, left with one piece of dough, I stretched and manoeuvred it and myself from side to side until the last lingering audience member left.











As well as drawing on Thatcherist material from the 1970s, the piece follows a tradition of feminist performance of the 1970s. Perhaps in so doing I am looking for feminist strategies of what to do in a once-again right-wing climate, accompanied by a sense of frustration of still having to fight this regressive patriarchy. I take my cues from artists such as Suzanne Lacy, in her *Net Construction* (1975), using physical matter as a point of mediation with a live audience; Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) in its clumsy and aggressive gesture expressed through domestic materials in a circumscribed environment; and the focus on pregnancy as experienced by the artist-mother of Kelly's *Antepartum* (1973) and Susan Hiller's (1977-9) *10 Months*.

Two years after the Atterbury Street installation I found myself overlooking the same bike rack space and bomb-damaged Tate walls with the remnants of the Thatcher performance, as following the project space exhibition we created an addendum-exhibition in the college's Old Library, directly above that space.

The preserved positive splatter of the salt-dough-attached-to-bits-of-carpet jotted around this formal wood-clad housing of books extended the dilemma of the incommunicability of matter with language; and reflected post-action(s), post-drama(s), post-attack(s) against the negative gouged out walls in the external space visible across the road. Through the window I could pretend the one was a relief or mould for the other, in a fantasy to overcome one's feelings of smallness as an artist compared to the mighty political powers of the past and present.

The road was being dug up too. Its encircling in fencing echoed the roundness of the splodges of the bomb marks. So many roadworks in London, the crust of the tarmacked road continually erupting, as if forces from below are breaking through to wreak hell on earth.

The attack on the walls of the white cube in this instance also had echoes of institutional critique, whereby the room is "perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportion but as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition convention serving an ideological function" (Kwon, 2004, p.12). The College then is criticised of inheriting a Conservative function, providing a platform for Thatcher's voice, and one that I am neither able to divorce myself from by escaping the room nor effectively fight using the dough.







The austerity march itself was quite pleasant, except of course for the depressing topic of conversation that we kept coming back to of this new, fully Conservative Government and what they would do to further devalue Art.

Where was the anger?

There were murmurings of excitement as we approached Waterloo Bridge, tension building, talk of a violent breakaway group:

The Real Rebels?

The Black Bloc?

Maybe “black bloc” is a bit of an overstatement: it was very scattered and not very aggy... Nothing happened, the cops took control of the situation, and that was that...

Aside from the black bloc thing, as far as we’re aware there were no other autonomous actions going on besides the A to B march. Not even ‘non violent’ civil disobedience stuff like we used to see from UK Uncut etc on big demos (Rabble, 2015).

The violence of gesture does not achieve communication with Thatcher’s broadcast voice in my performance – it does not make her stop – yet it persists in parallel, pursuing a different form of political engagement. Following Mouffe’s strongest argument that there is “no agonism without antagonism” (2007, p.4), this violence must be retained, as art in itself modifies and mediates the violence. It is a wordless violence expressed in action, matter and formlessness rather than articulated in dialogue. To start from an already modified, dialogical position would precisely create an artistic agonism without antagonism. In carrying out this performance I was then brought back to the original motivation for the research project: which was not to create a dialogue, but to create antagonism through my art practice.













My condom sculptures create form from liquid matter, with allusions to the bodily in their contraceptive containment. Made from rediscovered plaster, stacked and going stale in my studio, and condoms given away free at my local family planning clinic, their shape varies according to how hung, supported, squeezed or manipulated whilst hardening. As breast-like as they are phallic, when I first started making them they related to trying to conceive, but by the time of the Dolph exhibition they had found new meaning, relating to expressing milk, as well as an interest in how I stored and hid expressed milk when at my studio or in college, as if it was something illicit.

This act of hiding the milk made me think of the stories of the *pétroleuses* (Gullickson, 1996, p.159) of the Paris Commune of 1871 – emancipated women who were accused of smuggling petrol or paraffin in milk bottles with the intention of committing arson against the government, violating “traditional gender roles by joining the political discourse and fighting” (Clement, 2017). Conversely, the fantasy here is that of squeezing out actual milk to use to make posthuman bombs, grenades, in order to explode the current stasis, to make things change.

Elizabeth Freeman (2010, xvi) speaks of the queerness of artists “mining the present for signs of undetonated energy from past revolutions”. I am equally using the objects to record an anger at and refusal to accept the current conditions, creating the proposition that the objects may detonate in a future revolution. My idea of creating for the future contains elements that chime with Braidotti’s concept of the *Posthuman*, yet some are diametrically opposed:

The key notion in posthuman nomadic ethics is the transcendence of negativity. What this means concretely is that the conditions for renewed political and ethical agency cannot be drawn from the immediate context or the current state of the terrain. They have to be generated affirmatively and creatively by efforts geared to creating possible futures, by mobilizing resources and visions that have been left untapped. Faith in the creative powers of the imagination is an integral part of feminists’ appraisal of lived embodied experience and the bodily roots of subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013, p.191).

I fundamentally disagree in seeking to, or it even being possible to, transcend negativity, and I also take issue with the idea that the conditions for political agency are not always available to us. However, the *sense* of a lack of agency and inability to change things needs to be channelled, when we have not yet collectively found the forms of action needed to make changes. As such, my creation of objects for a future rev-

olution, drawn from the personal and from the past, does create an affirmative, feminist vision from untapped energies, although I still doubt that the depiction of bodily bombs would be what Braidotti had in mind for transcending negativity.

Halberstam and Ira Livingston offer a rich description of a posthuman agenda that “requires new protocols for reading the positivity of horror and abjection... as functional dysfunctions that make other things happen” (1995, p.14), however this is offered as a counterpoint to the “apparently negative” premise of a film, seeming to attempt to rescue it from that status. Whilst I see the feral as similarly trying to create new things out of that which is left as abject, it troubles me if the posthuman does not allow a creative work to be seen as both negative and affirmative.

Just past that point,  
we lost two more of our number,  
not to VIOLENCE  
but to go have tea and cake somewhere on  
the Strand.

We reached the end at Parliament Square  
only to find quiet

d i s p e r s a l  
o f t h e  
c r o w d s .

Kristeva says that “incapacity to rebel  
is the sign of national depression” and  
“who’ll rebel if human people are either  
undervalued or don’t value themselves ei-  
ther, or where the self has

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I used the existing structure of the building to  
wedge the condom sculptures into and hang the wa-  
tering-can-imagined-as-ignition-agent.

The central wood structure, made of a sodden door  
frame ripped out of my bathroom at home, was a last  
minute improvisation – I had been transporting it  
to get rid of it via one of the big bins at my stu-  
dio. Instead it got caught up with my installation  
materials, and I brought it to the project space.  
I played with leaning one piece of wood against an-  
other to form a structure, as for a bonfire, that  
the mass of paperwork and swirling paint would feed  
into, and that the milk sculptures might ignite. It  
also resembles a more homely structure like a tee-  
pee or child’s shelter, dissolving boundaries be-  
tween the different u

spheres of the space, st dio-

bringing the domestic, based and  
academic influences

toge- ther.









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so you can't bear it?"

(Kristeva, 2002, p.84 (my layout)).

We carried on along Millbank, observed by a policeman as we photographed ourselves outside Number 30, Conservative Party headquarters, the building that had been stormed in the 2010 student protests, then a more obvious scene of riot, complete with smashed in windows and fires blazing, the police overwhelmed by the number of students (Lewis et al, 2010).

Then we continued on to the Grosvenor pub, where our idea had first started, left with each other and our conversations, and talked about what had happened (or not happened).

With the references to the Paris Commune through building of makeshift structure there is also a parallel with the work of Heather and Ivan Morison, *Journée des Barricades* (2008), in which they built a barricade in the street from recycled objects. Whilst their title referenced the centuries earlier 1588 street blockades in Paris against the king and his troops, it also calls to mind more recent Parisian insurgencies utilising blockades, like the Revolution, the Commune and even the May 1968 riots (The Funambulist, 2012). However, I am not stopping traffic inside the gallery, with negotiated town planning permission as they apparently did (Hannah, 2009, p.111); this is not a commissioned work utilising dozens of volunteers to construct a dramatic street scape. Neither am I making massive holes in the structure of the building from within like Gordon Matta Clark (1972), with his penetrative crossing and dismantling of boundaries. Even in my outside interventions I have used structures that are already there rather than created to make protests, hanging objects and texts on places they are not meant to be, but relying on pre-existing architecture to sustain the vermin-like work. Like the Morisons I weave stories into the objects. Yet

In my video work *Mother's Milk* (2016) (included in the USB at Appendix A) I filmed myself over a period of 5 months up to the week the Dolph exhibition opened, expressing milk in various spaces, primarily in the toilets at college but also at home, in my studio, and even in moving, stinking train toilets.

Unlike in the US, the UK has no law requiring employers, let alone higher education providers, to allocate a space in which nursing mothers can express milk. Whilst a direct request to the University of the Arts London to provide such would have engaged with this issue on a hygienic, legitimate level, and a public protest or performance would have given it a social platform, I became more interested in my own experience of the dirty spaces and need to navigate in and out of them so as to perform this maternal function at an illicit level, that they have made feral.

Regularly filming and reflecting on this act in this way created a further link for me between the feral and Harney and Moten's section of *The Undercommons* on the University. I felt forced underground in undertaking this maternal act whilst a student. By engaging with the problem at a creative level rather than openly disputing ("upstairs, in polite company, among the rational men") the lack of provision of a space for expressing milk, I allowed the act to give me a feral position, to become part of my secret university behaviour, to find some power in being, as Peggy Phelan says, "unmarked", not making my cause visible (1993, p.7) – although arguably the cause emerges from the resultant film.

Several months after making the film, I taught a group of BA students at Wimbledon College of Arts, leading them in a collaborative installation activity where I asked them to think of alternative, unauthorised installation spaces within College to insert objects they had brought in. They took me to a private room provided for praying, resting, expressing milk and other designated activities.

without their negotiating power, I do not mount a direct confrontation, I go round the edges.

Nonetheless, the aspirations towards the Commune represent an ambitious social: a utopian vision for artists as part of a larger commons to create a different world with its own rules, and this cannot be staged.

Dorita Hannah points out (Hannah, 2009, p.111)

The paradox of the Morisons' project is that, despite its associations with political resistance (involving radical, hostile or unexpected manoeuvres), the erection of the barricade engaged in neither spontaneous nor furtive action.

The "furtiveness" of my work, which may also be a characteristic of the feral, leads a strategy for a more subtle but potentially more genuine questioning and undoing of structure. The furtiveness comes from a genuine fear of being caught, of needing to work around those obstructive powers and physical-





I imagined students sleeping off hangovers, having sex. One of my students wondered what would happen if someone was sick and someone else wanted to pray at the same time. It took the college security guards less than 2 minutes to spot us using the room and to come and have words with me. Whilst expressing milk would have been authorised here, I was told that installing art was strictly banned in this room - as it was – for my information - in the toilets.

*Art Riot* was not an outward riot at all. It was a calm stroll in a planned march. Were the artworks riotous? Not in the sense of acting as props for an impression of riot: loud, violent, acting in a mob.

Each of us brought an object that had meaning for us individually. The assembled object I wore caused me to reflect on its bodily presence, its ideas communicated only in its materials, left unarticulated in a verbal sense, but worn publicly, thereby signalling a different kind of communication and a different relationship with the public crowd. In the same way that our small group conversed amongst ourselves, took our own pictures, took our own route, made our own experiences that were part of but not instrumental to the purpose of the march, the objects were not instrumental to our walk, our conversations, our protest; rather they were worlds in themselves that threaded through it. There was then an internal social communication amongst our group; and a further communication between each individual, their work, and the rest of us; and in turn, with the public.

ly limiting factors of the site. My objects are genuinely hung in protest, not just to create the picture of a protest. Their domestic scale echoes the gendered approach to protest materials in the “the not-yet made, the making do, and the unmaking” of Cecilia Vicuña where, as Julia Bryan-Wilson frames it (2017, pp.119-120) “small sculptures of quotidian stuff could seem absurdly inadequate to the task she has charged them with, but in her reckoning, their modest size and ordinary or deskilled methods of construction (tying, bundling, cutting, pasting) were part of their socialism”.

The erection of this rotten door frame in the space also made me think of the refugee artist Kurt Schwitters and his improvised, sodden working arrangements as well as use of scattered wooden materials to hand-make his Merz barn, which was “...prone to flooding, so he was often standing in cold water” (Cooke, 2013). Yet in exile in the UK from Nazi Germany, isolated in the woods, his work on the barn allowed him to maintain his practice, piecing it together to form a



wet and mossy kind of feral space, whilst he traded drawings for food.

I did not use a pump, too slow, too much equipment to have to keep clean. As with making assemblages, I use what is to hand and the most expedient means possible of making something physical. Hand squeezing; I try to fill the whole bag by the end of each afternoon, not always in one sitting.

The video's soundtrack is a *Woman's Hour* interview with Margaret Thatcher (2013, part 1, track 1). The interview's evilness creeps up on you. At first she seems almost reasonable, as if she could be talking to me, for my benefit, saying what a shame it is that more women who go to university don't go on to "forge careers". It may not be current, but her politics remain our inheritance, as David Cameron MP, George Osborne MP and now Theresa May MP have made clear.

Then she talks about it being a "choice" for the mother to go to work or to stay at home, but says that it is not for the Government to help subsidise childcare costs, limiting her approved forms of childcare to nannies and female relatives, saying that nurseries represent "no life for the child" and rejecting the idea "that we might have a whole generation of crèche children". Yet she encourages women to undertake part-time work "to keep their knowledge up" and "also have something else to bring to evening supper to talk about with their husbands". She is talking to a privileged woman who has the privilege of making such choices, whilst being duty-bound to provide subject matter to entertain her husband: she is not talking to me.

Meanwhile I continue to milk my own breasts, hiding around the university. Where is my daughter? In a shameful nursery, perhaps - should we be able to afford it for a couple of days a week.

Yet I am silent and my thoughts for the purposes of this film are for myself, not Margaret Thatcher, not a potential career opportunity, not my husband. It is an isolated social I play out in this performance.





The 2010 protests were a failure, the 2015 protest was also guaranteed to be a failure in terms of changing anything, the austerity agenda so clearly fixed. It also felt like something of a failure not to have excited more people to join us in our party, not to have had a greater riot of artworks with which to permeate the crowds. Yet perhaps achieving an immediate goal or immediate change is not the only means of measuring either the impact of protest or the impact of art. Whilst the protest is a form of refusal that must continue, this refusal takes place primarily in response to and in dialogue with political policies and events originating from others. By engaging in making art works that not only represent another way of thinking but in the act of making and the act of experiencing them allow one to engage with another way of thinking, it keeps alive alternative avenues of thought in a way that purely responding to the politics does not. Our protest had not included any placards with instructions or demands but provided less readable artworks for the viewer – our fellow protestors and others in the street – to think about beyond the immediate protest. We were also saying

Halberstam is in the thick of the field in favour of the apparent lost cause: his *Gaga Manifesto* (2013(a)) offering a “wild archive” (his emphasis) of “unlikely visions of a queer world to come... that may well fail. Fail well, fail wildly”. This euphoric vision of both wildness and failure seems to be in stark contrast to the visionless deprivation of Clarke’s feral underclass, or to the life of a creature living out of place and at the edges of a so-called civilised world. Maybe the feral is so enmeshed in a ‘failed’ way of operating – unrecognised, living off scraps – that its possibilities have to be dug into. It is certainly off the grid of the capitalist definition of success to which Halberstam, via Scott A. Sandage (2005) links our definitions of failure. The status of my art objects, which I sabotage through acts of devaluation, from making them less valuable-looking to leaving them on the street, may state another meaning for the objects that chimes with Halberstam’s retelling of failure as an “anticapitalist, queer struggle” including “a story of art without markets” where “in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art and for being” (2011, p.88). Yet I am still not convinced I could commandeer Clarke’s underclass into having any such goals.

More echoes of this feral appear in Halberstam’s reading of – via his introduction to – Harney and Moten’s *The Undercommons* who, as he captures it “do not come to pay their debts, to repair what has been broken, to fix what has come undone” (Halberstam, 2013(b)). Even without a vision, without a cause, the refusal to accept the current circumstances, and will to disobey systems of recuperation, may in itself hold open the possibility of another world to come. For this reason, the act of protesting cannot be judged as a success or failure based only on its achievement in causing immediate change.

"think about your values"; "think about the materials around you". We succeeded in contributing our own conversations and performance of refusal in the context of a wider movement, which included but did not instrumentalise our art. There remained a solidarity between our core group, and we agreed to continue our conversations beyond the day,

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A sub-strata of art practice survives not through selling but through artistic communities that show to each other and talk to each other about what they do, and why they do what they do.

The Dolph space, inside a studio building in a former factory, is a contingent space that the artists are permitted to occupy for as long as the building's owner is interested in their rent; until the locality of Streatham becomes sufficiently gentrified that a property developer comes along with a better offer that will kick them out.

Whilst the social artwork and the gallery-based object are subjected to unhelpful categorisation by art criticism, I propose that a feral positioning of the art object to these categories – which crosses through and falls outside of them – may protect artistic practice from being reduced to one facet or purpose. Extending this to what a feral position can offer the social: it invokes a different reality to articulated protest, with subjects and objects alike running beneath, around and at the edges of the social, never being fully incorporated – but perhaps thereby finding their agency.







In the first year of my PhD, my 2014 project, *Passport to Pimlico*, set up a collaborative scenario for artistic engagement in the community hall of a council housing estate. At the time, I premised the project around Chantal Mouffe's agonistic struggle (2013), but reflecting on it now, the project created richer relations and forms of meaning than Mouffe's definitions of agonism and critical art is able to encapsulate. Through the feral I will now seek to elaborate what agonism otherwise constrained.

Yet perversely, taking agonistic disruption as the starting point for this collaborative, participatory project, gave it the means to conjoin with its surroundings: I was not out to please anybody; people were free to engage. Whilst Mouffe's definitions may be limited, translating agonism as a methodology for the project gave me the tools to propose the actions and relations of my art objects and installations, expanding into a specific social context. Agonism clarified aspects of my impetus to work in this way, just as I unravel what it left out; what could only be realised by enacting the event – and could not have been prescribed or foreseen.

Similarly, the battle line drawn out in my concurrent *Damaging Objects* (2014) exhibition sought to physicalise an agonistic fight against the white cube, somewhat reducing my objects' relationship with the space to a binary political stance, where the white cube became metonymical of systems and dynamics of reductive value and power that I wished to contest. However, an excess of objects spilt around the edges, fertilising the holes in the space, reluctant to line up. Their relation to the space, as an extension of mine, acting beyond the written framing I had given it. At the time I thought of this as a Bataillean excess, as he was my primary link to the social potential of physical matter. Now I reflect on it also in the light of elements of new materialism.





Walking around Frieze London art fair, October 2016, there is not much evidence of the feral, except perhaps in oneself. In the crowds of designer-clothed bodies, busy gallerists, and uniformed support staff, who else might be feral but a non-buyer such as myself? I have even snuck a bag and coat in under my daughter's buggy, unwilling to queue and pay £5 per item to check these things in. *Is it a feral sweat that creeps up on you in this airless place if you keep your coat on?* I didn't pay for my ticket either. "I wouldn't pay to come!" I say to myself, as if I am not buying into its power in some way anyway in coming at all: choosing to use old mechanisms of luxury to facilitate entry. I once undertook a sculptural commission for a London private member's club whose corporate restaurant group have a bar here; I received my ticket from them. The commission was several years ago, when my objects were discreet, readily sellable, before my work turned mouldy and its guts spilled out. Celebrities and rich members still stub their cigarettes out in the belly of my human-sized abstract ashtray. There is a buzz here, the buzz of the artworld: it is a different kind of club, with various levels of recognition, and to some degree you can pay to be part of it.

Do I really come only to critically look at the art on show, made cynical by the suffocating feeling of money and power also on display all around, or is there an idea I need come to somehow feel connected to this "art

If the artworks at Frieze London can be equated to caged animals, it is a short walk  
a  
little  
both in  
one's mind and  
within the  
same park  
to those in London Zoo:

their wildness  
kept  
contained,  
their purpose now  
to be observed,  
to entertain and  
to educate  
the paying visitors.

**Yet 4 days after Frieze London 2016 closed,**

a gorilla **ESCAPED,**  
for two hours (Sims, 2016(a))



world" of which I do not feel a part? Surely to be shown by galleries such as these, exhibiting their power in arenas such as this, is the best success an artist can dream of? To be part of this powerful, white environment of gleaming artworks that have been carefully selected, curated and primed for purchase in a Darwinian survival of the fittest, luckiest, cleverest, most beautiful.

Darwin, as Jane Bennett tells us, was fascinated by worms as much as any animal, hidden creatures who "‘make history’" by making "an earth hospitable to humans" and "by preserving the artefacts that humans make" (Darwin, 1881, cited in Bennett, 2010, pp.95-96) – yet I cannot help but wonder – what is in it for the worms? Perhaps the activity and sustenance of making vegetable mould is enough. Though what if the activity of making art cannot similarly sustain me?

I stalk around wondering, are any of the artworks here secretly feral? Pretending to be domesticated, happy to be bought for your home, but containing a wild inside that remains hidden from its owner?

And if the feral kernel of the art object is uncovered, will it come alive to bite the hand that feeds it?

Elizabeth Grosz relates art to Darwin's theory of sexual selection, but in the context of Frieze this does not seem like such a great purpose for art, if it would only enhance the prowess and desirability of the those buying and selling it:

What would a mass redistribution of art-wealth look like? It could not simply be liquidated into money; it would need to displace the power of the people and places holding art works: art would have to appear everywhere, for everyone.

The colors that fish and birds use to attract each other are the same ones we use to intensify our sensations and actions. Art is the human capitalization on these inhuman, animal qualities, the submission of these materials to other requirements than the instinctive. Art is the human transportation of these qualities, through framing, to any place whatsoever (Grosz, 2011, p.185-186).

Yet this environment which could indeed be "any place whatsoever" crystallises what had motivated me to turn to Mouffe in the first place, and pursue the question she asks (2007, p.4):

Can artistic practices still play a critical role in a society where the difference between art and advertizing have [sic] become blurred and where artists and cultural workers have become a necessary part of capitalist production?

I find that it is not so much Mouffe's questions that are restrictive but her answers; the assertion that there *is* an answer, a definitive plan we can enact.





When interviewing Joshua Clover, Nina Power (Clover to Power, 2016, 0:51:49), made the comment about the London riots of 2011 that,

I would defend people... taking whatever they want. Rich people always have whatever the fuck they want all the fucking time. How else are you going to take it from them short of some mass redistribution of private property? I mean, these things are so minimal compared to actual wealth, I mean like taking a pair of trainers or a fucking TV, these things don't compare to the kinds of things that rich people have... Maybe this is the inverse of the bread problem, right? Oh, but, you know, you could wear a bin bag and if you're hungry, perhaps you could steal a croissant from the bin, but you're not allowed to like nice things - fuck that! Rich people know what nice things are, they're nice, that's the point. Everyone should have them!

Conversely, debating what happened to the water cannon employed by Boris Johnson as Mayor of London, Power joked "I think some art collector bought it".

Rather than starting with the *Damaging Objects'* battle-line, I will start in a sub-room within the space.

I made an installation around a camp bed, on which is situated a white and blue megaphone emblazoned with a Conservative Party sticker, two-thirds of the way down the centre of the bed, standing erect like a phallus but open like a vagina. Whilst the megaphone is pointed towards the first room, there is no sense of it directing or halting the actions of the object-army attacking the walls. Neither does it have authority over its own hellish bed: it is silent, being overtaken by a filthy, swirling blanket strewn with maggot-like pistachio shells, the mouthpiece smeared with thick, petroleum-jelly-mucous and pricked by a spidery root of Svankmajeresque pubic hair. The abject state of the objects around it is then pitted against this symbol for Conservative politics, conflated with the installation as a whole, which is pitted against conservative curation. In 2014, in a project space in Hackney Wick, this is no YBA bed fit for selling: too dirty, depressing, excessive for Sarah Lucas' clean sexual puns; and its repulsiveness directed at the Government rather than in an Emin-like personal confession. However, this is not merely an exercise in grim, navel-gazing depression. Above the bed, perhaps spunked up there by the hermaphrodite posthuman bed below, dance cable-bodied sperm with papier-mâché heads, swirling and dangling around the ceiling, as if seeking to fertilize the space.

As someone who works with scraps of rubbish, and makes do with the rotting supplies I find in my studio, Power's notion of an entitlement to nice things is a fairly shocking proposition! Whilst on the one hand I admire its ambition, such a claim of entitlement does not say to the advertisers, the sports clothing companies, the electrical goods manufacturers, your concept of what is beautiful and valuable is flawed, it seems to say, yes, these things are good as you say but they should be democratised and distributed fairly.

These objects are normative in their desirability, their branding. Their theft is not like the intellectual theft from the University of Harney and Moten where the theft will be channelled into an underground movement. Rather it encourages the rioters to parade their loot proudly and in plain sight, where the looters can show that they too are legitimate members of this consumerist society. By validating the looted products themselves rather than the action of looting, the accepted desirable outer form is preserved, like that of the shop window before it is smashed in, like Marc Quinn's sculptures with his fetishization of the figurative form over the rotting, ageing, amorphous matter that moves beyond it.

Just as my desire to make the artwork lies embedded in the processes of practice rather than in the finished reified art object, I argue that it is not the material – say, the Nike trainers

The increasing success and corporatization of Frieze since its inception has perhaps changed the complexion of the participatory art staged here. Claire Bishop's *The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents* had included Frieze Art Fair as an example arena in which “artistic interest in collectivity, collaboration, and direct engagement with specific social constituencies” (2006, p.178) could take place. In 2016 the only participatory project I witnessed did not stand out as being any more “socially engaged” than the object-based gallery booths. Whilst Julie Verhoeven's toilet installation was a novel part of the fair, the “specific social” constituency it engaged was by default a primarily privileged one. Which is not to say that they should not be engaged in social issues – they should – but once an art-going location has been established, and its audience narrowed by invitation or ticket price - the sense of social-engagement is somewhat limited. This problematic is described by Francis Frascina (2013, p.364), where there is a risk that “Artists become gallery-based activists, sustained by art-world cultural and economic provisions, and their activated audience, absolved from responsibility, return to passivity beyond the confines of the exhibition space.” This would seem to then suggest a need to mix spheres and for both the artist and audience to act in more than one role.



- that matters in the activity of the feral. *It would tear them to shreds anyway!* Rather, the material is something the feral needs in order to act through it; as environment, as nourishment, as temporary prizes to be sold on or broken to pieces; tossing these husks to the side, full of holes and teeth marks (husks I then collect and make something with).

The positive message that I took from the lootings was the devaluation of these goods: the out of reach, reached so easily through theft and brought down in the world: inflated, aspirational items that are mass-produced through sweatshops, “disproportionately of non-white females” (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.257), whose labour is “vastly undervalued but central to the mechanisms of capitalism” (Bryan-Wilson, 2017, p.28), for a fraction of their retail cost: pocketable electronics, plastic, polyester and leather.

Yet if the feral is out for what it can get, why wouldn't it sniff out, lick along, suck up the nicest of treasure? It just doesn't have the means or will to pay for it, so will have to be lucky to get it. “Nice things” are then corrupted: acquired second hand by scavenge; stolen, scrounged or scraped for.

The objects I use sometimes turn into things of material value, though I seek to undermine and disguise this treasure once I find it. Having created a bronze sculpture, I leave it caked in filth, only half painted, or combine it with other materials in an act of sabotage as a tactic for undoing its formal value associations, wishing to drag it back down.

I don't work with the nice, soft, new clay until I've used up the mouldy, leathery scraps. I don't purchase readymades to make a statement with; I pick up things I find on my doorstep that I could imagine turning into something else, something not yet known to me. Yet sometimes I doubt the value of the rubbish I bring back, wonder why I accepted this trash and made it mine.

Whilst a sculpture's status as “art” already conveys a value and hierarchy not granted to every object, other more precarious, cheap, found materials I use seem even less primed for sale. The materials in themselves are explored as a means of breaking down these hierarchies, as a proxy of and in the wish for, being able to do so socially.















My interest in the film *Passport to Pimlico* (Cornelius, 2006), in thinking beyond boundaries, was in the idea of a community collectively discovering the secret of its own freedom. Set and filmed in a time of genuine, post-war austerity (as opposed to the created austerity imposed currently that redistributes wealth from the poor to the rich), an ancient document is found which says that Pimlico belongs to Burgundy, France. This allows the residents to declare themselves independent from the rest of Great Britain, its laws and governance, including the strict rationing measures in place and rules against playing music at night.

I came across the film sometime between the end of my Postgraduate Diploma and start of my Master's – a **fallow** period between studies when I was away from Pimlico but knew I would be returning. I felt like I wanted to make some connection between the college and this message of insurgency and freedom; of an idealised place where we could overturn rules and be creative.

It was a couple of years after the closure of the Colony Room Club in Soho, of which I had been a brief, late member from 2005 until its closure in 2008. Though unable, with my young and responsive liver, to keep up with the lifelong, functional alcoholics in the club, it created a linkage for me not merely between artists and alcohol, but to a community that actually spoke to each other and set its own rules. Whilst these rules do not seem significant in the context of social uprising – for example the fact that the club wilfully ignored the smoking ban when it was introduced in 2007 – it contained an important message for me of not adhering to prescribed ideas. The disorganised, seedy community that performed through this space is in opposition to the clean, singular, entrepreneurial acquisition of property for profit that encroaches on Soho now, and that has also edged out iconic LGBT+ venues such as Madame Jo Jos (Ellis-Petersen, 2014) and Molly Moggs (Butterworth, 2017).

Verhoeven performed the role of a cleaner with a stated socially-minded aim of “making the presence of the toilet attendant so irrefutably loud and unmissable” as to reveal “the invisibility of low-income labor professions, and the ethical concerns associated with these jobs”. Whilst such a goal may apparently tick Mouffe's box of “giving a voice to... those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony (Mouffe, 2007, p.4)”, I do not find that this loudness is able to evoke, by inversion, the toilet attendant's otherwise silence and invisibility, nor whatever “ethical concerns” we are meant to deduce from it. Verhoeven's attendant is not given a context, as in the real life female characters portrayed in Berwick Street Collective's *Nightcleaners* (1975).

An underclass may be invoked by this installation and performance, but it is not a feral one. It is benign, sanitary. There is no anger, no struggle. The feral, the abject, the dirty, none of these exist in this toilet: the stench of vomit, an overflowing blocked loo, sticky floors, wet seats, sodden paper stained with blood and faeces; nor the tension that is felt in a place such as this when the silent must witness the clients who are loud as they announce their expendable wealth through gossip, retching, shared drug-taking. The bodily is glossed over and its ensuing balance of power between those who expel its substances here and those who clean them up. Instead, Verhoeven's character appears like a pantomime dame, and is dressed

accordingly, dispensing advice and tampons-cum-sweeties to rich, well-behaved punters: making it hard to discern how this participatory practice would create the desire to affect change, or change in thought. Rather, the amusement and distraction seems predominantly to serve the purpose of corporate good, to complexify and keep fresh the Frieze brand, to ease the boredom of the Fair's clients as they queue for the loo, "this is definitely not one to miss, certainly not if you love a bit of Céline Dion to accompany your wee" (Arundhati Thomas, 2016).

The creation of a spectacle changes the perception of the character's role. Before my *Mother's Milk* film became a primarily toilet-based work, I had considered expressing milk publicly at college as performance. However, it was the feeling of being forced underground that made this into a feral act, which is what I wanted to then evoke. After all, the spatial politics of the feral must exist within the edges of spaces - like Gordon Matta-Clark's 1973 project of buying up useless scraps of land a few inches deep, "gutter space" (Matta-Clark et al, 2003, p.32); like the residents of Grenfell Tower, made feral following the loss of their homes in the worst fire in the UK in more than a century (Roberts, 2017), being moved from hotel to hotel and waiting to hear where the state will next offer to move them (Weaver, 2017(a)).

Whilst seeking to cross and circumvent the boundaries, the feral must navigate around pre-existing structures. Had I made the performance public this may have been more defiant in highlighting the cause of the working or studying lactating mother, but it would not convey the reality of the experience of feeling compelled to use these private toilet-spaces everyday; of keeping my role as a mother hidden from the academic context, a mother without her child present.

Clearly, the problem of art's absorption and commodification is not limited to objects in contemporary practice where it has long been accepted that "even the most 'dematerialized' forms and revolutionary ideas cannot escape the relentless system of commodification" (Wendy Vogel, 2012). Bishop introduces the problem of corporate sponsorship of museum installations in a short piece on installation art (2005(a)). Her use of the word "antagonism" in the article led to me initially describing my PhD project by that word:

The best installation art is marked by a sense of antagonism towards its environment, a friction with its context that resists organisational pressure and instead exerts its own terms of engagement.

Bishop's more extensive October article (2004) and later book (2012) would clarify this antagonism within an exclusionary remit limited to relational aesthetics. However, this short, succinct sentence appealed to my fantasies of creating a social and artistic revolution through object-based installation. My interest in the feral – which does not have a value system – relates to a desire to resist such a reduction, regardless of the form of the practice. So how can such a reduction be avoided?



I am not interested in pursuing here romantic notions around alcohol as personal, singular narrative experience, as others have done in terms of the wild and the feral – for example Emilia Nielsen in *Feral Feminisms* (2016), “The heart is getting shit-faced... Chasing cars. Eating garbage. It’s feral.” I am interested in it as another form of collective, social activity and space, as the objects swirling around my later Balmoral Castle pub installation (2014) are connected and animated by a hose pipe of alcohol. Moreover, Clover highlights the point at which King George I’s *Riot Act* of 1714 radically transformed the meaning of riot from “‘Wanton, loose or wasteful living; debauchery, dissipation, extravagance’ and even ‘unrestrained revelry, mirth or noise’ to its contemporary meaning of ‘a violent disturbance of the peace by an assembly or body of persons; an outbreak of active lawlessness or disorder among the populace’” (Clover, 2016, pp.8-9).

Pubs, clubs, student bars, create an informal community, facilitated by drinking. Whilst the Colony Room Club had a selection process and a membership fee, the level for both were set low: the manager needed ready cash to feed his heroin habit. It had a practical reason for being a member’s club: it was set up in 1948, the year before *Passport to Pimlico* was released, when the licensing laws required pubs to close at 2.30pm for the afternoon, then “the Colony and other such establishments enabled determined boozers to continue drinking when the pubs were closed” (Willettts, 2010).

Just as objects can embody the normative values of beauty and capitalism, so can they resist. Object-based work is just as capable of provoking socially-motivated thought as relational, performative work. Objects are no more inherently retrogressive than a performance is progressive. At a narrative level, the most effective incitement of the bodily, the downtrodden, the underclass that I have seen at Frieze was in 2011, in Andra Ursuta’s cum-dumped squashed body *Crush* (2011). Its title equated the crushing weight of peat on Iron age bodies in bogs with being wanked over (Ursuta to Laster, 2016) - the female object and the art object here left with that apparent residue. It also takes Darwin’s artwork-as-sexual-selection idea to a somewhat bitter but effective conclusion on Frieze’s floor. When Ursuta was asked to undertake a project for Frieze New York, she created a similarly abject scenario for the fate of the artwork, in building outside the fair “a quaint little cemetery where art goes to die” (Ursuta, 2013). Yet neither work gives any hint of seeking to enact any social change out of this dark, abject state.

At my point of entry to the Colony I had not yet been to art school and so coming here was a different way of meeting other artists. I finished my office job at 4.30pm and would often come here and chat with whoever else had chosen to mount the stairs to this tiny room, our proximity making introductions almost unavoidable, but such unexpected sociality with strangers in London felt like another freedom.

I did not become actively involved in the campaign to save the Colony from being turned into luxury flats, which was complicated by management and committee issues at the time. However, its loss contributed not only to my interest in *Passport to Pimlico* but in my protest projects based around pubs that I will elaborate on later in this thesis.

Further, in Soho itself, on Valentine's Day 2015, I created a protest-tribute to artist Eduardo Paolozzi when a number of his 40 year-old murals were removed without permission by the company working on the redevelopment of Tottenham Court Road station, some of which were reported to be destroyed (Hurst and Zaa, 2015). Following a public petition most were apparently later salvaged (Harris, 2015). I utilised a collage format, pasting onto industrial construction foam images and text from Paolozzi's own work, including collage, cut through with protruding objects denoting the industrial, futuristic Tube, and cheap romance and temporality in fake red flowers and a heart-shaped balloon. This theme of love, as derived from the date of installation, then extended into the social, and the love and defence of art. The work's playful irony was made more deliberately agonistic by hanging it on the corporate builder's fencing of the site entrance where it too would be destroyed by the developers (if not the Saturday night crowds carousing past it). Pregnant at the time, I hand-drew a woman I stuck on it, pushing a pram, out of which came the speech bubble, "The enemy of art is the property developer", reinventing the Cyril Connolly (2008, p.116) quote "There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall". With sex and drink amongst his other cited enemies of promise, not many of the writers or artists famous for frequenting Soho in the twentieth century followed his prescriptive attitude.





## Entrance closed

Please use new entrance  
at corner of Oxford Street  
and Charing Cross Road

 Tottenham Court Road improvement works



Eye protection  
must be worn







I was not allowed to stage *Passport to Pimlico* in the space of the vacant Balmoral Castle pub (where I instead later carried out an unauthorised installation) because of fears for the safety of its structure. A local councillor I had contacted, who had been campaigning for the pub to be re-purposed for community housing, directed me to the local community hall, who were happy to host the event for free.

I did not want to lose the initial idea of the pub completely. On the day of the event I created an activity for visitors to submit and illustrate ideas of what should be done with this vacant building. In this sense, the pub became an art object I brought into the space through photographs and text, highlighted for its potential to become a site of change. Whilst the film *Passport to Pimlico* concludes with the local wasteland being turned into a community lido, I sought to antagonise less utopian ideas, my favourite of the responses being "Turn it back into my local again".

In another narrative approach, Dale Lewis challenges and re-orientates both the art object and socially-engaged art through his painting *Chicken Wings* (2015), shown in the Jerwood Painting Fellowship 2016. It depicts a family of Clarke's feral underclass but of mine too, mixing up a depraved, bleak and joyous depiction of child rearing. It parallels the ideal of Henry Moore's Modernist idealised family group *Harlow Family Group* (1954-5) with an urban, rampant, trashy bodily that acts in excess of that. On the one hand it highlights what the art object leaves out - mocking its disconnect with what actually goes on in Lewis' hometown of Harlow - but on the other it shows the painting, a narrative art object, seeking to connect to an instinctive, indiscriminate, feral social beyond the corners of its canvas. Yet as narrative painting, also within a traditional art discipline, his account separates painting from its environment, with the assumption that it will always be displayed in a traditional gallery context. This leaves the problem unresolved of how to connect the artwork with its social context.

I too adopted an overtly narrative approach in my final work for this thesis - a last minute addition as I sought to connect with a social in my own local environment at the most disruptive of times. I received an invitation on the evening of the 2017 UK general election to put on a performance a few weeks later at Maxilla Space, an ACAA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art) studio space in a former nursery building under the Westway, a few minutes from the traveller's camp on the same stretch, near where I live in North Kensington.

Whilst thinking over whether to accept the invitation, the constituency of Kensington becomes the focus of national attention in the circumstances of a hung parliament as it becomes increasingly late in declaring its polling results. It takes three recounts, apparently all with Labour on top, and a delay of a day, before the Conservatives - who have held the seat since the constituency was established in

I applied for and received Camberwell, Chelsea and Wimbledon Student Initiative Funding for *Passport to Pimlico*, through a very vague proposal. Yet with the best will in the world, I knew I could not just put on a Colony Room style art party with no rules and lots of alcohol at college. Extracting what seemed more revolutionary in *Passport to Pimlico*, I focussed on the challenging of rules and regulations, and this gradually formed into a notion of creating an independent art state.

1974 - must finally relinquish it, by 20 votes. It had been seemingly unthinkable, having voted for Labour here for my entire adult life, but this time it made a difference. The margin had previously been between 7,000 and 12,000 votes (Kensington (UK Parliament constituency, 2017), (BBC News, 2005, 2001), so “safe” was this Tory seat, even under New Labour. Amidst headlines such as “UK election: shock as blue-blooded Kensington turns red” (Chaffin, 2017), and references to Kensington Palace and the constituency’s richest residents, a song keeps entering my head, “Painting the Roses Red” (*Painting the Roses Red*, 2017), from the Disney adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*, the original text also featuring this scene, (2010, p.69).

I agree to the Maxilla Space performance on the basis of this local connection and the desire to mark this new climate of change. Whilst the premise of the song seems at first dubious in terms of a social message - a pair of playing cards painting living plants to fulfil the whim of the Queen of Hearts - the lyrics reveal that the act of painting arises from the workers having made a mistake in the colour of the naturally planted flowers and need to cover up their mistake. That Alice takes up a sloshy brush without a thought for her pinafores to help the workers is a step of solidarity tying her goodness to the artistry of the workers. These are not the purist, naturally red roses the Queen had dreamt of to enhance her own colour, as Prime Minister Theresa May had hoped to consolidate hers. These flowers are a feral hybrid of real and fake; posthuman. The created red unifying their work then comes closer to the socialist claiming of the colour red, and the origin of the Labour rose, with its echoes of the “bread and roses” protests (Nolan, 2011).

Death is also present as a theme: the flowers will die through being painted, but in this natural and unnatural Disney world the greater cause is that of the workers - the posthuman playing cards - who would lose their heads for their mistake.



Deciding to hold *Passport to Pimlico* on the UK's May Day public holiday, I put out an open call inviting content that referenced both traditional (Spring/pagan) and political May Day (or Workers' Day) themes; twin threads by which I intended to weave a politicising combination of community rebellion and the celebration of the eruption of spring following the sterility and containment of winter. I described myself as the event creator rather than curator as I wanted the work to happen as organically and freely as possible on the day. I said yes to almost all of the submissions I received and gave the artists an approximate area to set up, but was happy for them to move around too and for parts of the work to be unknown to me until the day itself.

On the day, I inserted the work of over 60 artists into the Community Hall and public square within Churchill Gardens Estate. I aimed to create an environment for their works to become living agonistic art objects, battling as individual eruptive elements, challenging the usual restrictions that govern the community's use of the space in the creation of this independent art state.

Works were not credited individually on location, this was a mass entanglement.

Trying to manifest the agonistic model for critical art in a gallery context, in *Damaging Objects* I set up the objects and gallery space as if they were at war with one another, entailing on the one hand objects that were enacting damage (or seemed to be planning to) and on the other objects that appeared to have had damage done to them. The one strand of objects was imagined as aggressive, picking a fight with the space; the other melancholic, fragile, and licking their wounds.

Yet were the "melancholic" strand of objects simple damaged losers in a linguistically-framed imaginary fight, or did they contain another form of rebellion? Whilst my intention was agonistic, the population and fertilisation of the gallery with these growing, decaying, abundant objects, full of energy and force, acts beyond agonistic instrumentalisation itself.



There were an assortment of sculptures made with flowers. Tulips in sinewy bronze, erupting out of punched-up florist's foam bricks; others of the same species wilted flat with sludgy shellac into a muddy waterfall of translucent recycling bag plastic. A hybrid, the tallest and most complex, rests its tulip-bulb ball-sack on a coke can, overtaken by toy animal fur, plastic grills and plastic spiders, all killed, replaced and preserved by being burnt out into cool aluminium. Perhaps even the casting process is an act of anger, of murderous violence. I love this flower, but I can't keep it alive as it is, too flimsy, too vulnerable; instead I'll destroy it and keep it forever in metal. How'd you like that, stupid flower?!

Climbing up to gain the utmost height, willowy roses and magnolias perch and teeter on angular bits of iron or steel armature, or chopped-up shipping pallet, messily melded together by snot-trails of glass-wax sap. In truth, these flowers are figurative. In a democratisation of materials, they mix together as a flowery commons - or is it an undercommons?











How does my approach transfer to an actual commons? A real community?

Since staging *Passport to Pimlico* I have come across more literal approaches combining passports, art, independence, and utopian ideas – such as Lucy + Jorge Orta's *Antarctica World Passport* project (2008). However, I did not want to create any barriers to entry, any border control mechanism, any type of members' club or art institution that might require a pass to enter it. Even if freely available, I felt even these tokens could put off a "furtive" social that is more circumspect about art; the supposedly inclusionary act of a passport to freedom becoming exclusionary, bureaucratic: what about undocumented migrants who would not want to give their details for a passport? In fact I had to think in the opposite direction, of transporting what I find valuable in the independence of art as an imaginary territory outside the college itself. By inserting college individuals, and others, into the community space, we became a disruptive element, invading their turf –

As I write up this thesis I read Howard Caygill's account of Jean Genet's relationship to flowers, which makes me think again about how I divided up my installation and cast the flowers as "damaged" rather than "damaging". They germinate within an apparently passive, secondary position, away from the overtly active, weapon-like objects in the centre:

Genet recalls his first visit to the Middle East as a young French colonial soldier in Damascus, along with his first and only foray into military architecture: a gun tower which collapsed on its first trial... Genet describes how he saw in his prisons that 'one seed, one ray of sunlight or blade of grass was enough to shift the granite. The thing was done, the prison destroyed' [(Genet 2003, 386)]. His doomed gun tower metamorphoses into the France of the German invasion where 'in that ruined temple, mosses and lichens appeared, and sometimes kindness and even stranger things: a kind of almost happy confusion, elemental and classless' (Genet 2008, 387).... The resistant subject takes a stand against brutality alongside delicate and vulnerable beginnings, keeping open the time promised to and by that beginning (Caygill, 2013, p.135).

From this stance, the flower can be as damaging to restrictive structure as the weapon, and tells of a different kind of revolution through this act of undoing. Whilst I had created a conjunction showing the army of objects protecting those at the wall, the flowers themselves were not envisaged as enacting resistance themselves. Despite this, and having assaulted the flowers through different means from wax to shellac to the intensive torture of metal casting, I had also not only preserved them, but fortified them in their hybrid materiality, allowing them to stand as subjects and not just decoration.

but we came to *them*. That act initiated a relationship, which was ultimately creative, conjoining.

Despite its old school sense of little England, the plucky Cockney, the film's premise should not be mistaken for a populist movement of independence, like the vote for Brexit (which, when it came, 69% of this borough's residents would vote against (Financial Times, 2016), where, in the present day, only 35% are White British (Office for National Statistics, 2013)). It is the opposite in some sense, given the characters have to renounce their British citizenship in order to enjoy their new-found freedoms - more akin to the calls for London to declare itself independent from the UK and remain part of the EU (Hooton, 2016). It is a spontaneous act, a quality which might define it as a riot (pp.91-92, Clover, 2016) over a more organised political movement. It could be thought of as a movement towards Power's "right to nice things", but although their actions are in favour of indulgence, pleasure, drinking and eating: using what is at hand whilst they have

The flowers are not used as weapons, as, for example, the flower Pipilotti Rist uses in her video performance *Ever Is Over All* (1997) to smash car windows. Rather, they take on a form of personification just as the weapon-warrior subject-objects do in the line-up in the centre. At an object-by-object level, the resistance is inscribed in the individual works as the tulips burst out of individual bricks and appear to be approaching the origin of the battle, as a pile of bricks with an iron hand emerging from it similarly bursts through man-made structure.

Less than a week after the 2017 General Election results and its uncovering of a less typified social group and unexpected political shift within Kensington, celebration is turned upside down. Early in the morning on 14 June 2017 I receive a text message from a friend that Grenfell Tower is on fire, a friend who still remembers me living there when I was 17.

In fact he had helped move me out - which had always felt like something of a lucky escape - not because I felt unsafe about the building - but at a personal level about different people my flat-mate would bring to the flat, and one in particular who she left me alone to live with whilst she went to see her family in Eritrea for two months. When my key got stuck in the lock it became a fortuitous spur for me to seek refuge with a friend instead. I was an undocumented subtenant with no money or family support, returning to the UK alone after emigrating to Australia with my parents earlier in my teens. Still I reflect that being white and well-spoken helped me to negotiate my way out.











it rather than eking and apportioning it out according to the dictates of government; these are not desirable items to own but materials to consume; or in the case of music and curfews, experiences to have. It is hedonistic, but it is also a demand to be with other people, to commune, for existence itself not to be restricted.

Writing about Susan Hiller's automatic writing works, Lucy Lippard (1987) said "The line between coherence and incoherence depends partly on individual interpretation and partly on social contracts: if people promise not to think beyond the rules imposed on them, then "coherence" will have much narrower boundaries". To follow Mouffe's arguments logically removes the possibilities for artistic antagonism. Yet to grasp its antagonistic kernel – which she fiercely protects – and share in that motivation rather than attempting to follow its flawed plan of action, allows a more meaningful response as an artist to this impulse, which does not have to be filtered through a dialogical formula.

I feel this precarious sense of my own relative privilege keenly as Grenfell grows in my mind as a social trap, and in reality as a death trap that others could not escape from – ultimately in the most literal sense. Also in the reports that "Black and South Asian survivors... felt the implicit message from everyone they contacted before the fire for help with the building was "you are a guest in this borough, and a guest in this country, you have no right to complain" (Foster, 2017). Moreover, in the horrifying racist abuse of Grenfell survivors on social media, characterised as unemployed migrants and freeloaders (Howarth, 2017).

Whilst Professor Danny Dorling's analysis of UK human geography shows that "Increasingly, Britain is segregated by inequality, poverty, wealth and opportunity, not by race and area" (Dorling, 2005), tower blocks like Grenfell seem to be an exception to this rule. He goes on, "the only racial ghettos in Britain are those in the sky in neighbourhoods which are, at ground level, among the most racially mixed in Britain, but where the children of the poorest are most often black". Reflecting on Grenfell Tower through Dorling's analysis, Lynsey Hanley (2017) believes that this demonstrates that "not only are ethnic minorities more likely to be working-class by wage and occupation, but they experience discrimination – tacit or outright – when allocated housing". I had not thought of the housing in those terms when I lived there - gaining my subtenancy through apparent luck and word-of-mouth. Living in a high rise is not bad in itself; serious neglect of basic concern for the lives of the tenants will make it so. Now when I review the images of the overwhelmingly non-white victims, I start to wonder what less than lucky processes might have brought them to live here.

In the days afterwards, thinking all the time about the entrapping of hundreds of people within their burning homes, one of the most disturbing aspects becomes the reports that the insulating cladding recently strapped to this formerly fire retardant 1970s block and "that might have led to the horrifying blaze at Grenfell Tow-

The flowers I bought and brought to Churchill Gardens for *Passport to Pimlico* at their most affirmative were an offering and celebration of spring. Yet they also disrupted the space, inside and outside, in terms of its use and appearance.

In its pagan roots (McGrath, 2004, p.85), May Day speaks of the land rights of the local people in its direct response to the land and the seasons; bodily rights in the centrality of fertility to the festivity, and the will to make merry over the impositions of the church and the state. This will was such that "In the sixteenth century riots followed when May Day celebrations were banned. Fourteen rioters were hanged, and Henry VIII is said to have pardoned a further 400 who had been

er" was "added partly to improve its appearance..." so it "would look better when seen from the conservation areas and luxury flats that surround north Kensington, according to planning documents" (Griffin, 2017). I darkly think, well, they won't have to look at it at all anymore. Except we do, every day, and not all of us in luxury, its charred skeleton evoking the ashen remains of those inside, those in parts, those evaporated into the sky without being identified. I wonder when they will board it up, but also feel we should continue to see it and live with it until the call for answers is satisfied.

My daughter's nursery is evacuated to another location as debris is being blown onto it from the tower. A street away, within one of the aforementioned conservation areas, is David Cameron MP's house - we know he is home when we see the loitering armed police - and my anger is sharpened by the appearance of his name on a list of 71 MPs who are also landlords who had voted against a Labour amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill to force landlords to make sure their properties are "fit for human habitation". (Palmer, 2017) There are stark social contrasts in this borough. As Power says, "You don't have to have a substantive concept of justice to know that things are unfair. It's not a moral position, I mean, it's a practical, political position." (Clover to Power, 2016, 1:13:25).

"Painting the roses red" continues to play in my head during this tragedy, but in a dark twist of words that I sing only to myself, lines form about those living there losing their heads; burning alive in their beds.



sentenced to death" (Johnson, 2017). This history tallies with the ties between merriment and riot pointed out by Clover, and deepens my desire to re-politicise the relationship between this apparently quaint festival and its alternative significance as Workers' Day.

We brought further gifts to the community space: activities, creativity, music, a make-shift adventure playground, even free food: children's eyes lighting up at the colourful cakes. The politics were a gift too, if less obvious: documentation of occupations and protest, insertion of materials in the space, strange, unreadable performances, and, at its most invasive, a takeover of the TV in the bar with a black and white film from the 1940s rather than the live horse racing that some of the locals had expected to be on.

The news of Grenfell absorbs me completely; I find it hard to finish my thesis, six weeks from submission. Instead I flea to the college workshops, not so much to escape writing as to be rid of thinking through language, to instead channel my own subjectivity into objects, to commune with matter, to put this violence into pulling apart and engaging with the solid, dirty world, not the clean, digital page. I make lumpen, collapsing towers out of clay poked with three holes along each floor, like the three windows on each side of Grenfell. I think about how I used to walk home from waitressing and identify my window, counting down six rows from the top, one across, in the middle of the 19th Floor on the East side.

Trying to formulate the *Painting the Roses Red* performance in my mind, I keep turning over what flowers mean to me. I think more morbidly of the investments that I make of flowers, being encased in structure and buried in tomblike material before being burnt out to be cast in metal; the mournful, deathly quality of killing them off, whilst desperately seeking to preserve them. In the planned performance this mourning turns to anger, just as the community has become angry, as it should. When will the violence come I wonder? Surely there will be riots? Burn Kensington! Burn the town hall!

I attend two of the Grenfell Tower protests in the immediate aftermath of the fire, both of which are peaceful. For my own violence, I content myself to burn my sculptures, blow-torching ash black and fire-orange red onto useless bronze lillies I never knew what to do with.





My use of personification to link and complicate the relationship between people and plant matter may be an attempt on my part to introduce an anti-hierarchical politics in terms of our place in the natural world. Bataille reflects (1985, p.36),

A man is not so different from a plant, experiencing like a plant an urge that raises him perpendicular to the ground. It will not be difficult to show that human morality is linked to the urge to an erect posture that distinguishes the human being from the anthropomorphic ape. But on the other hand, a plant thrusts its obscene-looking roots into the earth in order to assimilate the putrescence of organic matter, and a man experiences, in contradiction to strict morality, urges that draw him to what is low, placing him in open antagonism to all forms of spiritual elevation.

Yet the Western hierarchies imposed on the world are such that as recently as 1967, Aboriginal Australians were actually classified in terms of “‘flora and fauna’” (Marks, 2007) and not as people. This would give a horrific dimension to the linking of the flower to a suppressed commons, if it was viewed as a separate rather than shared state of being. Yet as Bataille expresses it, the plant’s baser characteristics can be equated to an unacknowledged part of all of us.

Complicating the linkage between merriment and riot, I have mixed feelings, later that summer, about the celebration of Grenfell Tower at Notting Hill Carnival, with misgivings that the anger for the victims has been too readily transformed into theme. It is my last summer living in the area, the re-expansion of my uterus for a second child finally dislodging me from my Affordable Housing in this otherwise unaffordable Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC).

Coming home with my family at Carnival’s culmination, a police van blocks our route. It stops and the officers get out to assist a black man on the pavement, whose three stab wounds in his back are visible to us through our car windscreen, in our protected bubble, my white two-year-old daughter singing “Twinkle-Twinkle Little Star” (Taylor, in Taylor and Taylor, 1806) in the back seat. He appears dead, but slowly comes to as the police dress his wounds; his friends’ faces ashen, cars behind us beeping, despite the scene ahead.

His attack may not have been racially motivated, but his status as a victim, amidst the green love hearts in solidarity with Grenfell, the revellers of the spectacle of Carnival, resonates with the Tower’s racialised abjection. Lee Jasper (2017) puts it that “As with Grenfell Tower, RBKC’s approach to public safety at carnival bears all the hallmarks of their routine and malicious disregard for public safety, particularly when those in need of protection are black and poor”. Further, it brings to my mind the Carnival’s historical origins in racist violence, amidst a housing crisis (Moore, 2013, p.22).

Similarly, Monique Allewaert notes in *Ariel's Ecology* (2013, p.5) "As was already clear in *The Tempest's* [Shakespeare, 1734] account of the Algerian-descended Caliban, colonial texts typically understood African-descended human beings as constituting a kind of interstitial life between humans, animals, objects, and sometimes even plants." Rather than merely condemn this practice, she too looks for the rich possibilities "that emerged from the minoritarian position adumbrated by Ariel and most fully instantiated by Afro-Americans who were excluded from the fold of the human and forced into the position of parahumanity". It occurs to me that her formulation of the parahuman, like Braidotti's posthuman, seeks to decentre the human whilst still ori-

enting around that word. Nonetheless, her creative undoing and reconstituting of an emphatically negative position of the colonial past, feeds my reflections on a feral that still exists in the present, against a colonial language and a denigration of certain groups as below the status of people that also persists.

Whilst Clarke's ring-fencing of a socio-economic group as an unreachable feral underclass may not be explicitly racist, its animalisation of the rioters speaks in such a language of colonial history that is deeply racist. David Cameron MP talks in similarly dehumanising terms in evoking "swarms" of migrants seeking to get to the UK from Calais (Elgot and Taylor, 2015).

In apparent colonial excitement rather than deliberate denigration, Darwin had described indigenous people as if they were wild animals saying, "part of the interest in beholding a savage is the same which would lead every one to desire to see the lion in his desert, the tiger tearing his prey in the jungle, the rhinoceros on the wide plain, or the hippopotamus wallowing in the mud of some African river" (Darwin, 1997,

It was constructed in 1965 by a white social worker to ease racial tensions in Notting Hill (Moore, 2013, p.164), by creating a "caricature of the Carnival of Trinidad, reflecting the organiser's perceptions of black culture in Britain, as that of a passive, fun-loving people" (Pryce, 1985, p.35). The extent of white on black violence that had taken place here in the race riots of the 1950s and 1960s was only released decades later (Travis, 2002). Despite such uncomfortable origins of appeasement, riots morphed into genuine celebration, and over the years the local African/African-Caribbean community took ownership of Carnival. It now speaks of multi-cultural land rights in the area; rights which the Grenfell tragedy show are not being fulfilled. Underneath the celebrations, the violence I witness has been inflicted internally, to a young man; the riotous energies remain diverted from the powers that be.



p.478). Its polarising effect however does not seem so far removed from Allewaert's quotation of Fenelon, the governor of Martinique, writing in 1764 "...I've come to firmly believe that it is necessary to guide the negroes like beasts". Meanwhile Ter Ellingson demonstrates that the myth of the "noble savage" remains a racist construct (Ellingson, 2001, pp.296-297).

I had improvised on discussions I'd had with the management regarding the content of the event, and hadn't anticipated artists drilling into ceilings and walls and pissing them off: a swarm of artists in the nest.

Whilst I had to negotiate with the local Council and the managers of the Community Hall for authorisation of Passport to Pimlico, the individual artworks did not require such sign-off, which facilitated a gap for disruption. Extending the entangled politicisation of the event, a lorry parked up containing an unauthorised exhibition within the outdoor space; the May Day dancing pole, May Queen photo-booth and face painting brought families in, but they were also engaged in subversive activities like drawing on the pavement, and a game where the participants attack each other on paint canvas.

Is the feral different from the wild? They can have slightly different connotations, but are they too interlinked to separate them out?

Ann Colley compares the practice of Victorian hunter/collectors bringing home trophies of tiger or leopard skins with the descent of the title character of *Tess of D'Urbervilles* into a "feral state" (2014, p.149-154), where Tess' skin too becomes hunted. However, whilst this analogy may succeed in evoking Tess' objectification and dehumanisation, Colley says that the Victorians sought to stroke wild animal skins to get in touch with their own primal beings: the wild becoming desirable. Meanwhile Tess' feral skin is not hunted as wildly desirable, but as socially outcast and out of place.

This may have both racial and gendered implications, as Dipika Nath's history of feral children describes the case of Marie-Angélique Memmie LeBlanc of Champagne,

... the first case of a feral girl recorded in any detail. She came into the village of Songi in the region of Champagne one summer evening in 1731, armed with a club. With one blow, she killed the dog that a villager set on her and it took much some guile before the villagers managed to capture her. She was about ten years old and her skin was black. At first, the villagers took her to be "a negro" but then found that the skin of her face and hands had been coloured with tar or a similar substance (Nath, 2008, p.64).

Yet beyond this equation of dirt and ethnicity, the feral as a category may remove the distinction of "whiteness" of a subject's skin colour, as I have argued Clarke does in his creation of an "underclassed" criminal race, a criminality he states is inherent. Nath goes on,

European Feral children were indisputably human, and their animal-likeness could be speculated upon and marvelled at without disrupting racial hierarchies among humans because European feral children could be assimilated into the "primitive" or "lower" human "races" (Nath, 2008, p.3). ...This racial logic was also gendered; compared to



















Of my own work in the event, I had discussed decorating the outdoor space with bunting, but rather than this consisting of traditional flags, it would be hung with feral-looking found objects and reclaimed police tape. The colour and playfulness within the format lay claim to the bunting's associations with collective celebration, but the use of discordant objects rid it of its decorative, patriotic format, transforming it instead into an encouragement to disobey.

Similarly, I was asked to create an art competition for children within the event that related to Winston Churchill, whom the estate was named after. Rather than serving up a positive assertion of White Britishness in Churchill, which was both at odds with my aims for the event and with

European feral boys, Memmie was read less as a sign of natural humanity than of a degraded, inappropriate, and animalised humanity that had to be trained or domesticated into a specifically gendered humanity (Nath, 2008, p.10).

As a female, then, her masculinised wildness had to be stamped out, yet her feral degradation would remain.

For Halberstam (2013), the wild encompasses a wide range of subcultures, with theories drawn from media as diverse as animation, film-making and painting, each offering the promise of a different vision of freedom in relation to the social, sexual or pansexual. However, whilst he describes the wildness of the title character in Wes Anderson's adaptation of *Fantastic Mr Fox* (2009) in aspirational terms as the leader of an animal revolution, I would argue that in fact Mr Fox and his animal neighbours are in a similar state of precariousness and criminality to that of Clarke's feral underclass. Looting, hiding from authority, driven underground and on the run, there is an anxiety and negativity of the feral that presents a shadier reality than Halberstam's optimistic vision. I think of Postcommodity's artworks based around the border between the US and Mexico, the endless fencing - if not yet wall - glimpsed through the moving camera in their video installation *A Very Long Line* (2016), creating the anxious energy of expectation and a journey, but with no identifiable departure or end point; and *Coyotaje* (2017), their night vision installation of a border patrol beast. These scenarios seem closer to the predicament of the *Fantastic Mr Fox* characters: where escape is neither likely nor necessarily permanent if achieved. Or of Clarke's criminal class, where the end of a prison sentence does not equal optimism.

Yet others have aspirational hopes for the feral, so this may be a distinction between concepts rather than between the words themselves. For Monbiot, the feral means getting in touch with one's "wilder" instincts, and specifically in the UK landscapes, cutting back on such mundane, cultivated species as sheep that he argues have ravaged its naturally occurring wildness. His position does not sound so far from that of the Victorians when he describes the exhilarating



the ethnic diversity of the local community, I employed tactics of playful negation, making a Pop-art style colouring activity for visitors to creatively deface copies of the leader's black and white outline.

experience of picking up a freshly killed deer, yet he terms it “overwhelming, raw, feral” (Monbiot, 2014, p.34). In the US, *Feral* (Fox, 2016-) has become a TV show about being queer and twenty-something in rural Tennessee. Meanwhile Billy-Ray Belcourt, argues for a queer, specifically indigenous feral, but as a point of departure rather than a state of being. He seeks to distinguish this feral from Halberstam's wild, which he then undoes by concluding “What would happen if we went wild... It's your move” (2016, pp.30-31).

My preference for the term feral, beyond rescuing it from Clarke's pejorative usage, is in its very fluidity and mixing of meanings. Complicating the position in Australia, David S. Trigger's (2008) survey of indigenous and introduced plant and animal species, uses “feral” to describe a transitory

but opposite category to the wild, the wild meaning native in Aboriginal culture. The feral can then also refer not only to “animals or plants that have lapsed into a wild from a domesticated condition” (Anon, 2017(b)) but to an introduced, domestic out of place. Trigger describes how attitudes towards such introduced species vary between different areas and tribes of Aboriginal culture, as well as by the qualities of the species in question. However, the feral is not necessarily a derogatory term, and in terms of what does and does not belong; what is accepted and what is rejected, many species are embraced and absorbed into Aboriginal culture and sometimes even mythology.

Meanwhile in white Australian culture, notwithstanding that the application of Trigger's plant and animal classification would term all non-indigenous people as feral, the feral as a social term implies a host of derogatory attributes. Here the “Top Definition” of feral in the Urban Dictionary (GM, 2006) is:

Poorly dressed, spoken and educated people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. (See also Chav, Bogun, Trailer Trash)

Known for their prowess at stealing cars and their utter disregard of birth control options.

In addition to an extremely high swear-word vocabulary, their children have constantly running noses, dirty faces and unkempt hair.

In the case of the infant death of Azaria Chamberlain in the Northern Territory (made famous by the film *A Cry in the Dark* (Schepisi, 1988) starring Meryl Streep as the infant's mother, with her often cited line “The dingo took my baby”), it was the white family who were out of place. Through decades of investigations and court cases (Latson, 2014) – it was the mother not the dingo who was thought capable of being evil as such. It was her who had gone into the wilderness, it was her who was accused of killing and covering up the murder of her own



## Passport to Pimlico event continues

PLEASE  
LEAVE  
PREMISES

QUIETLY

THANK  
YOU

THANK  
YOU

## Pop Art Churchill

Can you colour Winston Churchill to make him look as fun as Marilyn Monroe looks in Andy Warhol's colour? Colour your Churchill and add him to the Wall!

[illegible]

Inspired by the 1948 Ealing comedy *Passport to Ponder* in which residents of Ponder declare themselves independent from the rest of Great Britain, the May Day Bank Holiday is an opportunity to revive the independent spirit of Ponder, through art and May Day celebration.

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child; the dingoes, if they were physically responsible, could not be morally responsible as they were in the wild creatures, behaving wildly. Yet had the attack happened in an urban or suburban territory, with dogs out of place, they may have been characterised differently. The dingoes were introduced to Australia an estimated 5,000-10,000 years ago (M.C.R. Oskarsson, 2012), so began as feral, but have been slowly incorporated to be thought of as more wholesomely wild and native.

Thus in this complex web of interchangeable definitions, what does the feral consistently indicate? It seems to demonstrate a non-conforming element, an outsider within a defined territory, a disruptive force. For me, these qualities seem full of productive potential for the art object, whilst having no defined format, purpose or agenda. Moreover, the fluidity between meanings and interpretations between a wild that came from a domestic and a domestic that became wild is reflected in the either-direction transition that occurs between inside and outside environments in my installation practice. Unfixed, the studio object in its wildness and in its cultivation is not destined only to stay there; or to be prized in a domestic context, or the prescribed space of the gallery; it can also disrupt the street and the community space. Even in the gallery, the practice continues to make reference and movement towards the outside beyond its periphery, meaning that when detritus enters the practice and transitions into these spaces it is not as an enclosed exotic curiosity like a Victorian animal skin but as a social and natural intrusion to break down the distinction between inside and outside. I continually remind the viewer that the social circumstances influencing the conditions in which I am working, and in which the work is being viewed, cannot be separated from the object.

The white roses I bring on the evening of *Painting the Roses Red* (2017) will be tied into the streetscape near tributes, bouquets and ever sadder and more hopeless missing posters for the victims. For the performance (see video in the USB at Appendix A), we lead the visitors and other artists outside the gallery space and I find a black gate on which to work, threading the flowers through it at various heights, like the floors of black Grenfell directly behind it. The red paint I dip the flowers into inevitably takes on a further meaning of the blood shed by the victims, a visual reminder of their “‘corporate manslaughter’” (Cowburn, 2017) as the flowers become sacrificed as stand ins for the subjects. It is two weeks and three days since the fire, and I am already worried that the anger is no longer being channelled, that the riots still have not come, that here in the streets it has dissipated into feelings of edginess, emptiness and acceptance.

The paint then also becomes a layer of protection, thickening the petals as a call to arms,





a call to remain angry, a call for social change. Its vibrancy coats these figurative flowers not to let them disappear in smoke like those without remains, those without papers, those who died but may never be named in the Tower we face. The opaque Kensington and Chelsea Council (Grafton-Green and Mitchell, 2017) had sought to disappear the ugly block into the sky through its shiny cladding, instead the same cladding disappeared the people inside by killing them.

The feral underclass described by Clarke (2011) was in his terms never domesticated, “individuals and families familiar with the justice system who haven’t been changed by their past punishments”, being born and brought up at the periphery of society to enter a criminality living in and out of prison. As such, the ferality is described as innate to them, and this contributes to the racialisation of his use of this term. Yet he comes dangerously close to acknowledging the ferality as a commonality to all of us when saying “Equally worrying was the instinctive criminal behaviour of apparently random passers-by”. However, what for Clarke may have marked a point of contagion, where the criminal ‘race’ infects the non-criminal, may also tally with a more positive crossover reported during the riots - the riots as they spread beyond London - between different racial groups. The feral may then extend to a contemporary Allewaertian creolisation (Allewaert, 2013, p.5), where the material, cultural and economic conditions of a place contribute to creative interactions, and diversification becomes primary:

“Normally we don’t get along, we have our own turf, we have our own area and fight with other gangs,” said one who took part in disturbances in Birmingham. “But the other gangs there like, we all together one day [sic], we weren’t fighting each other, we were fighting the police. That one day, we all got together, the Asians, the blacks, the whites, we all got together, it felt like one, you get me? It felt like we were like one big gang ... We took over Birmingham” (Muir and Adegoke, 2011).

Khalik Allah, talking about his film *Field Niggas* (2014), (referencing Malcolm X’s 1963 speech *The House Negro and the Field Negro* (2012)) about people now living on the streets in Harlem, sees no distinction in the feral – or as he calls them “field” – subjects that he depicts and those with an apparently more civilized existence. Further, his subjects are drawn from different racial backgrounds.

You got these two different slaves and basically it’s separating one group of people, and now putting them in a caste system, and which now they are going to bicker and fight within themselves... It’s the same type of people, but you give one a certain privilege and the other you do not to [sic]. And you got the house nigga thinking he is better than the field nigga... The field nigga’s also really trying to get off the plantation, kill the slave master... When you look at my photography... I’m dealing with a group of people who live outside... so they don’t even literally have a house... these are the homeless... and they don’t work, they are in and out of prison, in and out of mental hospitals and in and out of regular hospitals (Allah, 2014, 0:01).

The point, as much as to speak for those in the field, is to say: this field is all of us.







When creating the bunting sculpture for *Passport to Pimlico*, I always described it as “feral bunting”, the feral still present for me in my objects, although I was thinking in terms of agonism.

I used the bunting at the time to demonstrate an agonistic methodology communicated through objects: firstly in my approach to the materials; then extended to that of the installation in the community environment; then opening this up to the motive for my wider one-day project.

I did not create the bunting on my own but carried out a masterclass with first year BA Fine Art students from Chelsea College of Arts who contributed to it. I explained to them my agonistic methodology, starting with objects that we retrieved from the college’s **REFUSE** area to make sculptures to hang on the bunting. I told them how, when appropriating and combining objects, rather than making a harmonious composition, the motive was to physicalise agonistic dissensus between one object and the other. (My logic was: it is physical, so it is antagonism, but it is imagined, making it is agonism.) Only after that would the installation create spatial, and in the context of this public

When Monbiot aspires to the feral, he pursues wild adventures that only the wealthy could afford to experience in the way that he does, travelling to exotic, hidden locations across the globe, as he continues to posit this existence as somewhere other. After spending time with the Maasai tribe he asks himself, “So why did I not defect to Toronkei’s community? It is a question that still troubles me... I could not cope with the uncertainty: with the dislocation of not knowing whether I would eat today or eat tomorrow, or still possess a living - or a life - in a month’s time” (Monbiot, 2014, p.46). Yet he is describing a state of precarity that exists in his own society, for those in the field in Harlem, for the immigrants without papers left homeless from Grenfell Tower. When he references wild outbursts of violence here, he only does so through the fiction of J.G. Ballard, which he condemns but puts down to the smallness of our managed existences rather than actual problems, “sublimated lives oblige us to invent challenges to replace the horrors of which we have been deprived”, (Monbiot, 2014, p.6). Oh really? No horror here? He seeks to demonstrate the wildness and precarity that is absent from urban and suburban life; the motive of my art practice is to demonstrate the wildness and precarity that is found within it: it does not need to be made feral, the feral is already a part of us, whether we like it or not.

From one morally-superior Oxbridge-educated, white, middle-classed male to another, in some ways Clarke’s feral is more empowering of the underclass he describes. Although he pins them as a voiceless threat, their place is given greater meaning than that of Monbiot, who does not even seem to see them. Mel Y Chen points out how, “Insults, shaming language, slurs, and injurious speech can be thought of as tools of objectification, but these also, in crucial ways, paradoxically rely on animacy as they objectify, thereby providing possibilities for reanimation” (Chen, 2012, p.30). She describes US Senator George Allen’s public singling out of a man of South Asian heritage at a rally as “a macaca” - which is “apparent Tunisian slang for ‘monkey’ or ‘macaque,’ often used in racist ways to refer to darker skinned Tunisians, some of whom are referred to in Tunisia as ‘blacks’ (2012, p.32).





space, social, agonism through the occupation, disruption and interpenetration of the space. Similarly when the event was over, the bunting could return to the studio, and indeed occupy other exhibition contexts, where, I suggested, the agonistic physicality of the work would be retained, stored for the future.

the performance of my objects, it corresponds with and utilises the performativity of language, just as my writing practice here operates as a continuum with my installations. Similarly, Chen's performative notion of animacy swims fluidly into Bennett's animation of "what Deleuze and Guattari called a certain "vagabond" quality to materiality" to describe a state of interchangeability at an object level, where:

I had been surprised to find the **REFUSE** area locked, as during my MA I had known it as a treasure trove of trash, as items were freely dumped and adopted: cast out art works; furniture; dead tellies and fridges; the bought materials of presumably wealthier students who had lost interest in them or did not want to transport them home. The notion of a readymade could itself be recycled as found artworks became re-owned and re-used by another artist. As students we had land rights to scavenge whatever was left in this paradisaic dumping ground. To lock it does not deny this right, but a key has to be obtained; ID and suitable reason for access needs to be given. The casual pick up or throw down is eliminated.

Yet this racist remark took on a 'viral' significance via the internet, that would take on a life of its own, turn his language ferociously against him, and eventually lose him his seat (2012, pp. 31-32).

Imogen Tyler argued of the London riots that "the underclass is a political formulation that must be contested" (2013, p.13), but when she explored the "scum semiotics" of the language used to describe the riots (2013, p.3-4), it was only to demonstrate its abjection of those it described, not to reanimate or divert it. Whilst my reclaiming of the feral is primarily through

The activity of metabolization, whereby the outside and inside mingle and recombine, renders more plausible the idea of a vital materiality. It reveals the swarm of activity subsisting below and within formed bodies and recalcitrant things, a vitality obscured by our conceptual habit of dividing the world into inorganic matter and organic life (Bennett, 2010, p.50).

Ahead of my rediscovery of the feral and development of it into a concept, it had been at this same level of excited materiality that I sought to initiate agonistic debate through objects, as I imagined being able to transform their political status through performativity.

Bishop had based her (*October*, 2004 article) ideas on antagonism on the ideas of Mouffe and Laclau. Her article was widely disputed, notably by Liam Gillick (2006), in its misreading of such, which logically led me to Mouffe to find out what the actual ideas were, ideas which she had since developed into her own theories around art and agonism. I found Mouffe entirely coherent, giving a direction to a feral that I otherwise could not direct, and I became convinced that my objects could be better described through agonism than antagonism because whatever performance of destruction I made in *Damaging Objects*, I did not in fact destroy nor actively seek to destroy the space. By Mouffe's definition this would make the struggle an agonistic rather than antagonistic one.





As I am writing up this thesis, one very hot day in late May 2017, the **REFUSE** area comes alive, bursting in excess of itself as barriers are put up around it, extending its boundaries beyond the still-locked centre, to exhibit a healthy mass of disparate goods.

I scan and reject these offerings – I am granted no studio space as a Research student, my land rights are curtailed in terms of what I can store onsite. My traversing objects huddle in commandeered corners of shelving in the foundry and ceramics workshops. My college locker is stuffed with objects and publications. My old TV sits under a desk in the computer room, our only dedicated space, cables removed and sufficiently ambiguous in status that no one has questioned or removed it.

What did acts of destruction in art mean now anyway? Gustav Metzger's concept of *Auto-Destruction* had become significantly diluted from his originating action of 1960 (Watling, 2012), where he painted acid onto nylon canvases that destroyed themselves on sight "to provide people with another vision, to offer them something they haven't already got – something significant on the aesthetic level, but also on the political plane" (Metzger and Obrist, 2008, p.30), to be reconceived in Michael Landy's (2013) "Auto-Destructive" house of-horror *Saints Alive*, where the National Gallery, became an art theme park, where figures of saints mechanically hit themselves. Or where Matta-Clark's architectural interventions are echoed in a commercial gallery in the "half-antagonistic half-dependent" (Grafteo, 2009) acts of Urs Fischer, digging up the gallery floor on his way to becoming an 'art star'.

Further, on the basis that in agonism "opponents will treat each other not as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries who will fight for the victory of their position while recognising the right of their opponents to fight for theirs" (Mouffe and Power, 2009. p.1), I then proposed that the format of the art installation takes the place of dialogue in mediating the antagonistic impulse - the impulse of the artist to destroy the gallery; the gallery to destroy the artist. The opposition generated by this rabble of sculptures then became my sculptural equivalent of an agonistic "confrontation between adversaries" (Mouffe, 2002, p.9).

Yet this belied the complexities of the relationship between myself, the gallery, the politics and history of the white cube, and the diversity of the objects themselves, just as I laid out my attacking line in *Damaging Objects* (2015) somewhat too neatly, illustrating a defined purpose and argument for them.







The section of Pimlico ring-fenced by the college's grounds similarly presents challenges in terms of transporting work in and out. There is a Gatehouse where security guards will stop you driving in without prior arrangement, and it scrapes inside the Congestion Charge zone so any daytime trips come at an extra cost.

I limit myself as far as possible to smuggling my work in and out at night – or to what I can carry on my bike or in a wheely suitcase on public transport.

I watch with interest as others pick through the objects more carefully: a painter picking up frames for canvases, frayed fragments of former work still attached, another with a more eclectic collection of egg boxes, a decorated umbrella and small pieces of hand made stands or stools.

What Bishop missed out when arguing for socially engaged art practices to be judged critically on their artistic rather than just social merits, was the tactile, practical, aesthetic experience of the artwork. She talked about the socially engaged branch of practice of artists like Thomas Hirschhorn being a continuation of their gallery practices, but that other practice did not appear; no relation was properly drawn. She succeeds in running participatory practices through the mill of art criticism. Yet what about the reverse approach of drawing out the social relevance of the artists' wider practice? To remove the presence of materiality from the description of the social value of the work seems flawed. In truth, to take her example of Hirschhorn, what most appeals to me in Hirschhorn's practice is his use of parcel tape. His use of parcel tape gives me an unarticulated clue as to what Bataille and Gramsci might mean to his practice; a clue that I can relate to at a material level that is less prescriptive than the linguistic framing both he and Bishop make around his work. The visibility and precarity of his taped joins suggests a different relationship to theory than smooth, seamless, hidden junctures would. For me, the expediency, the precarity, the plasticity of the joining material then becomes its feature, its trashiness becoming fruitful. His excess lies beyond the newspaper cutout, beyond the readymade form, in the formless supply of commercially produced tape. If it was mine, I would compulsively use it up until it was gone, then use whatever else was on hand until I really no choice but to go buy some more. The glossiness of Hirschhorn's more recent (2015) practice suggests he would just send an assistant out to buy twenty more rolls; the precarity something of a show.

The Grenfell Tower disaster plays around both my head and my local environment, becoming to me one of the most horrific demonstrations imaginable of the disabling destructivity of prioritising the outer gaze of the viewer – the Council's decision-making apparently representing the interests of this largely but not solely wealthy area beneath the tower – over the viewed, apparently ugly, with the hidden but known failing functionality of the housing for its social body within.

Whilst the stringing together of the objects in *Feral Bunting* conjoins them, each is undergoing a form of attack within its conglomeration: they are united but not in a common cause.

I feel that I am against manifestos, but perhaps orchestrating them in this way is akin to a manifesto. I may avoid pinpointing the meaning exactly at the time, but I still leave markers, sometimes incorporate text, to extrapolate the meaning.

The representation of a fight in *Damaging Objects* was spelled out by the army of objects pointed at the space, marching at it, attacking the walls, invading holes in the ceiling, fertilising its white sterility and picking at its flaws. However, breaking it down, where does this installed confrontation lie between actual violence and pure metaphor? In seeking to disrupt and attack the space I am also engaging with it, but not through creating an agonistic debate, as was its premise. Rather, written throughout the installation in the language of my sculpture itself is an affirmative, other relation.

I think of the pretty pastel-coloured patchwork of neatly curved terraces I would look at from my window when I lived in Grenfell as a 17-year-old. I felt then that they were part of the same London; yet apparently where I lived was objectionable to its own social landscape. The notion of smoothing over and beautifying this ugliness in order to make it as unseen as possible, as cheaply as the lives within it were treated, drills home a parallel between social and aesthetic and abjection. Whilst I do not think it is fair that only some people get to live in nice places and have nice things, superficial answers like the democratisation of Nike trainers, or the cladding of Grenfell may disguise this momentarily, but they do not address the internal issues, problems and antagonisms – as was discovered at the most disastrous and horrific level here.

Conversely, the view from outside is not the view from inside. Despite the precariousness inherent in my living situation in Grenfell Tower, I had been full of the richness of London in my starry-eyed view of what I saw around me. I re-find old photographs I had taken inside the flat, and think of the snippets of creativity that existed in my life. Apparently mundane things I took interest in, the colours of my food cooking in a pan, my geraniums and shoes placed on the window sill. More memorably, the view of the Westway on the day of the '99 eclipse, the day I hurriedly moved out, whilst stopping to take photos of the light changing, the cars on the elevation dimming their lights. There are many photos of flowers in Holland Park, where I would spend time during the day before my evening shift at work.



Not fitting with my articulated means of attack, they followed a different route to breaking down the capitalist hierarchies that for me the white cube represents, which is more akin to that described by Braidotti, through Deleuze, of:

releasing human embodiment from its indexation on socialized productivity to become 'bodies without organs', that is to say without organized efficiency... Firstly, it attempts to rethink our bodies as part of a nature-culture continuum in their in-depth structures. Secondly, it adds a political dimension by setting the framework of recomposition of bodily materiality in directions diametrically opposed to the spurious efficiency and ruthless opportunism of advanced capitalism (2013, p.91-92).

This a-functionality and lack of efficiency seems key to the feral in the art object – in its existence for and of itself, falling out of imposed systems of value, or of political utility, including agonism. In truth, in *Damaging Objects*, there is no difference between the objects lined up and the objects that hang back. I may choreograph and curate the objects to display a resistance to conservative curation and commodification, but I have already expressed such a resistance, less consciously or knowingly in my making of the objects, and it may be better expressed in the objects placed more freely in the space, responding to its nails and holes.

In the 18 years that I remained nearby Grenfell Tower, when I caught sight of it, was always a strangely reassuring presence; somewhere I had survived. The horror, sadness and confusion of seeing it now is sometimes overwhelming, and the questions remain of what has happened to the victims; what has and will happen to the abjected social that survives. Yet it cannot just be abject, as the survivors need housing, care, support; as we must continue to interrogate and engage with its issues and live with it as an existing, continuing problem.

Ahead of the Maxilla Space performance, I returned to Holland Park to take photographs of the roses again, this time conceiving of them in terms of a bountiful beauty that is not as open to all as I had thought as a teenager. Instead I ended up rediscovering the Park's different areas, observing the diversity of people coming here, and it becoming a place to bring my laptop and hop between its partially shaded tables as the sun moves across the sky, in-and-out of the big trees, and I finish my thesis in the summer heat. The tables, of course, are not just frequented by rich residents of the nearby mansions, but by parents and children of different backgrounds, tourists, other people writing. My favourite are the old guys who bring their own flasks of coffee and bottles of beer, talking loudly or playing chess quietly, and never seem to buy anything from the café. They fortify me in their presence, in imagined solidarity, if I haven't bought anything there that day either. Perhaps a conflict has been had and won long ago; these are tables for the public! Not just the customer!







At an object-level, the insides of the pumpkin bomb, with its addition of a handle-trigger is shaped very deliberately into a weapon, yet, undoing that, it displays a resistance to discrete form through the vibrant matter – to use Bennett’s term – of the living, dying object; flesh-like, womb-like, digestive, showing its guts.

The turd gun is not really shit at all, it is a burn-out of a series of empty egg shells stacked in a phallic tower, but the process itself was unpredictable enough to digest the form into a more grotesque-looking product.

The objects attacking the gallery space also suggest a destructive violence that goes beyond the rationality of agonistic debate; their apparent purposiveness not in pursuit of an achievable or recognisable aim. There is no identifiable cause beyond disruption itself; none of them act as instruments.



When I started the PhD I specifically distinguished myself from Bishop’s choice of artists, those who she quotes stating they did not seek to change things politically (2004, p.4). I certainly wanted to change things! I still do. However, I have less faith in the power of agonistic gestures, less faith in following a plan for change.

Griselda Pollock points out the “none-too subtle slippages between art fairs, with their intellectual decoration and outreach programmes, and biennales” with their “spectacularisation of critical thought” (Pollock, 2015, p.20-21): the critical and commercial becoming indistinguishable, the location irrelevant. Conversely, if an object is feral in nature, and there is no place for it, then it will continue to be feral wherever it is placed. In this sense, the feral bunting is feral regardless of where it is displayed. Yet as the temporary gallery space, by definition, houses objects that do not belong there, or at least do not stay, and neither does the viewer, the feral quality of the feral bunting is emphasised more clearly in being placed in a civil site where it more clearly does not belong, as when hung on the community hall.







The limits of Mouffe's political argument notwithstanding, there was a richness that I found within agonism, gouging out its antagonistic insides, for my practice to feed off. Like my objects hung physically on boarding, bunting, disused building apparatus, Mouffe's rigid structure did not preclude creating a vibrancy within it.

Bataille's performative use of language gave matter a role that Mouffe's did not, and I used this to assist me. His visceral, bodily language was full of tropes, but he seemed to maintain the power of matter as matter, including political power, where "Marx's point of departure has nothing to do with the heavens, preferred station of the imperialist eagle as of Christian or revolutionary utopias. He begins in the bowels of the earth, as in the materialist bowel of proletarians" (Bataille, 1985, p.35), and makes the rich assertion that "Communist workers appear to the bourgeois to be as ugly and dirty as hairy sexual organs, or lower parts; sooner or later there will be a scandalous eruption in the course of which the asexual noble heads of the bourgeois will be chopped off" (Bataille, 1985, p.8). He used the full force of language to weave this materiality into antagonistic statements, telling a story with it, but not one that replaced the actual matter he described.

Seeking to disrupt the *Documenta* format, if only in terms of site, Hirschhorn presented a more agonistic side of Bataille when creating his *Bataille Monument* (2002) "a library, snack bar, TV studio and public sculpture installed in a working-class Turkish neighbourhood away from the madding crowds of the Fridericianum" (Fox, 2002). However, his proclaimed objective of "reasserting the autonomy of artistic activity" (Bishop, 2004, p.75) is altogether more directed, with himself as the artist-director, than mine was for *Passport to Pimlico*. As vague and shambolic as the idea was, my openness and need for the input of others - both artists and viewers - allowed it to grow into a nonhierarchical event and environment that had a life of its own. The housing estate was not a backdrop or stageset to make a pre-planned statement for an invited art crowd; I was led to the site through a disused pub, the loss of which resonated with other lost spaces in my recent experience, and made me think more deeply about the circumstances of the local community, to want to do an event for them too, rather than just the University. I then knew that we had to come to the community if we wanted them to engage with it; the community hall manager confirming to me that the majority of the residents would never visit the nearby Tate Britain or Chelsea College of Arts. In this context, Hirschhorn's statement that "to make art politically means to choose materials that do not intimidate, a format that doesn't dominate, a device that does not seduce" (Bishop, 2004, p.75) might translate into my approach of seeking to break down this social boundary through bringing the art to the local space that was less intimidating in terms of environment. However, I would not wish to be so prescriptive in whether or not a material could be thought of as intimidating. Moreover my "seductive device" - as it could be called - of the May Day festivities were as important in engaging the community as elements of his *Bataille Monument* were with his. His apparent desire not to intimidate also seems at odds with the "disruptive approach to 'relations'" (Bishop, 2004, p.77) that Bishop was pursuing, as was I.

In seeking to fit my objects into an agonistic model, I argued for the dual value of the objects, both as allegorical assemblages, and as inassimilable forms. Aligning my work with a Bataille approach, the dirty, sexualized objects I used were then imagined as the agonistic element, seeking to initiate eruption. Rather than illustrating the political theory, I sought to unearth an immanent politics within the objects, from the actions used to create them and the materials from which they were constituted, later extending to their actions and relationship with the space.

As I saw it, the processes I used to create a sculpture contained inherent destruction and violence: the incineration of vegetables and replacement of their insides with iron to create bomb-like forms; the dripping of wax as it corrodes the petals beneath it; the grinding of metal; the slicing and spearheading of appropriated items into precariously conjoined assemblages. Whilst Arendt did not allow the visual art object into her conception of the public realm or the realm of action, I used such processes to put the creation of these objects instead in conversation with her

description of labour which, “when it incorporates, ‘gathers,’ and bodily ‘mixes with’ the things provided by nature,” and “does actively what the body does even more intimately when it consumes its nourishment. Both are devouring processes that seize and destroy matter, and the ‘work’ done by labour upon its material is only the preparation for its eventual destruction” (Arendt, 1958, p.100). The processes are aligned with the bodily, it’s decaying, collapsing, oozing morphability, seeping out of structure or actively breaking through it. Yet the sculptures are unnaturally preserved in this gooey in-between state of nature, with plaster and paint bursting out of latex and kept that way, exploding pumpkin turned into aluminium before its hairy insides can take their natural course and rot into the ground. The finished objects then enter the realm of ‘Work’, where “From the viewpoint of nature, it is work rather than labor that is destructive, since the work process takes matter out of nature’s hands without giving it back to her in the swift course of the natural metabolism of the living body” (Arendt, 1958, p.100).

Hirschhorn’s more recent work *In-Between* (2015) was a very-artificial looking installation evoking damage and collapse, with the intention of creating an “aesthetic of destruction, ruin and disaster” (South London Gallery, 2015), which, perhaps unfairly makes me reflect on *Bataille Monument* as being overly staged too. Writing this now, a week after the Grenfell Tower fire, half a mile away from me, and passing it every day, the idea of engaging in destruction to illustrate, without much context, an Antonio Gramsci quote that “Destruction is difficult. It is as difficult as creation” (South London Gallery, 2015), seems somewhat frivolous. Whilst Hirschhorn also ties the installation to the climate of war in the world, it does not seem to account for the immeasurable grief, suffering and social destruction attached to the aesthetic he seeks to emulate.

This makes me rethink my *Damaging Objects* exhibition as an expression of the desire to break the objects out of the gallery and to utilise the holes and climb up the boundaries that were already there in order to do so. It was a form of exchange in terms of what conversely could have grown out of the holes. Just as my protest works seek to defend the social value of existing structures, it is not truly destruction that I seek to evoke but the creativity that exists on the thresholds of structures, and its vulnerability and loss when those structures are either overly rigid, or destroyed and repurposed for profit-driven motives.



I then further conceived of the violence of this physicality as an antagonistic exchange with the environment, the incorporation of found materials in my objects highlighting not just the waste of that which nature cannot recuperate but the heterogeneous element created by an otherwise smooth, shiny and homogeneous consumerist society.

Whilst I necessarily eventually had to abandon agonism because this richness of violence and physicality was read into rather than actually to be found within its walls, the lack of belonging and lack of a theoretical housing for my practice had to be experienced for me to realise the value of not just expanding and reinterpreting the walls to make the objects fit, but the value of them not fitting. The feral then became a means for me to conceive of a new, transitory territory for the otherwise abjected material art object, that is also social.

In *Damaging Objects*, the objects were itinerate guests in this white cube, as was I as I installed them, neither belonging nor not belonging, like the floating litter in the canal outside.

Writing now in summer 2017, I learn that the Schwartz Gallery space has not hosted an exhibition all year and appears to be homeless too: if it has not closed already, its days are surely numbered, sitting in the shadow of the prime real estate of Stratford and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Hackney Wick's recent cultural history has become a selling point which simultaneously prices out most of the artists who have been living and working here. A couple of streets away a former artists' studios building was sold for in excess of £23 million (Savills, 2017).

For the time of the exhibition, the objects were dependent on this space; now they must be dependent on another, on storage, on not being destroyed.

*The Drips* (2015-16) \_\_\_\_\_-----is composed of several  
| | | | | | | | |  
small objects that rather  
than standing on their  
  
own as complete sculptures,  
  
-----trickle along and  
|  
|  
depend upon  
the corner  
|  
|  
internal architecture  
of an  
artists'  
project-  
space-  
basement,  
Block 336 in Brixton,  
-----  
to-string-----  
----- them  
-----together.



A few of my objects will squat here for a couple of months, in winter 2015-16.

Block 336, a registered charity, is itself above the status of squatting. It shelters at the bottom of a building owned by another charity called “We are 336”, offering accessible office space and a community conference centre to disability and local groups.

Perhaps the shared charitable status funnels down some protection; Block 336 has also now achieved Arts Council funding; perhaps if it pays its way it will last it out here for a few years longer, which seems the most we can hope for in this climate of property redevelopment.

Down the road, in February 2016, a month after the *The Drips* comes down, the traders in the Brixton Arches under the viaducts are given 6 months' notice to leave (Dixon, 2016), only with "the opportunity to return to the arches after [refurbishment] works at stepped rents" (Network Rail Property, 2016). London is being cleaned up, cleaned out.

After the traders are gone, how will they get the damp out? Its  
smell, its chill?

*The Drips* hang on an industrial, over-sized air conditioning unit with associated corroded pipes, a remnant from the space's prior purpose in the 1970s and early 80s: housing *Coutts Bank's* computer centre. My objects, a disparate crew of creaturely bits, leech ~~leach~~ off it, tapping it to sustain them, swinging around the office infrastructure.

Through a feral, provisional relation  
I ally my art objects, and that found in the space  
which is not fit for purpose;

that which does not conform to the view that the key goal for any thing must be maximum profit, maximum efficiency.

My parents-in-law have lent us their dehumidifier to try to help dry out our flat, mould forming behind the furniture, its windows rotting, so full of condensation. My daughter, aged 18 months, is scared of this whirring machine and sometimes calls it 'dog', shuffling past it nervously or imploring me to come rescue her and carry her over it. More recently, she has discovered its beeping buttons, which entice her to approach and fiddle with it. She tames its threat by making it her plaything.

Mike Kelley, says “I live in a warehouse in the downtown district. Now that all of the businesses have failed, it is populated by artists. The skeletal remains of once-thriving factories can be seen from the picture window in my loft... Since the structures are no longer functioning, they have slipped into my territory – the realm of nonfunctionality, the world of aesthetics...” (my emphasis, 2003, p.7).

In this allied alley, objects and spaces can have meaning for the subject:  
for the artist, the viewer, the casual passer-by,  
through the paths

we weave around them

physically;

in our imaginations.

“No, architecture itself doesn’t  
frighten anyone–” Kelley continues (2013–14, p.9), “it is its foundation in social architecture that does so. But this, like the ghost of a ghost story, is invisible...” Whether or not they frighten, perhaps it is precisely those ghosts, this residue, that I seek to make visible in my installations, of the social architecture that has existed in the spaces, the social that exists now as it is repurposed; the feral slippage between one sphere and another before gentrification takes hold.

Of the hybrid forms, where to start?

A small, shiny, red meaty organ,  
looking like little lungs

or a pair of vaginas  
hanging up,

Social cleansing is writ large here too. Spike Lee’s assertion that there are “No more black people in Brixton” (Bailey, 2014), may be a provocation rather than statement of fact, but the knock-on effect of these property developments for the residential community can be expected to follow a familiar narrative, as Lee suggests, “So gentrification, this thing is not just this borough, this city, this country, it’s happening all over the world. And the thing everybody neglects to talk about is: where do the people go that get displaced? Bottom line, where do they go?”

the inside is golden, valuable,  
but it’s all dried out.

If the moisture is where the life  
is, it is all but sucked out,  
limited to the sheen of its surface.







Installing with a 3 month-old baby in tow, I  
bring the objects to the space in batches,

hanging from the top	drip
	by
	drip

and building from below, piece-by-piece

My protest works started with the North Pole pub / Tesco project (2012-13). The pub closed down for sale and rumours circulated about it being bought by a supermarket, first Sainsbury's – who backed off, then Tesco – who did not. A group protest was organised at the site, which I attended quietly and took photos of. Local shop owners poured drinks for us, it was their livelihood at stake too. Five years on, three of the four Indian-run grocery shops will have disappeared; the one that remains containing the Post Office. The English/Irish butcher's shop hangs on for now; the chain betting shop; the greasy spoon.

*The Drips* does not fit within a verbalised agonism “giving voice” to a cause, it did not take a form suitable for demonstrating with Reclaim Brixton, or the Brixton anti-gentrification protests in August 2015 that reached national press when the shopfront of Foxton's estate agents was kicked in (McKie, 2015). It does not follow the instruction of Mouffe that “The objective of artistic practices should be to **foster** the development of ... new social relations” – a statement which is as prescriptive as it is opaque.

Doctor **Foster**

*Went to Gloucester  
In a shower of rain.  
He stepped in a puddle  
Right up to his middle  
And never went there again!*  
(Anon, 2017(c))

*The Drips* can only signal, in its sheltered oozing, the in-between precariousness of a visceral and bodily existence that quietly, dirtily survives and procreates amidst the detritus of property redevelopment. Yet in doing so, these internally hung forms reflect the same state of struggle against these conditions as the objects I hang outside in protest. In the small-print and previous work of Mouffe, antagonism is not just channelled into linguistic argument but *does* extend to objects, albeit as a transformative metaphor for





Banners left on the site became a backdrop to my first installation in the series. I then returned at night, outside of that organised structure to contribute to the protest in a different way, by creating a series of small scenes in the doorway, followed by text painted on the boarding. This series continued over a four month period.

It was the first of two unauthorised projects relating to the widespread demise of pubs in London, given over to inner city gentrification and property development. It seems to me that the loss of 31 pubs per week in the UK (Smithers, 2014) is also indicative of a sanitisation of public and social space, and increasingly isolated, private leisure space, discouraging community interaction. Given that these establishments were not just functional drinking holes but previously central to the community and local social life, their devaluation also feels socially disabling.

pluralist democracy rather than an interest in the object in itself. Drawing on Derrida's 'constitutive outside' she states

every object has inscribed in its very being something other than itself and... as a result, everything is constructed as *difference*, that is its being cannot be conceived as pure 'presence' or 'objectivity'. Since the constitutive outside is present within the inside as its always real possibility, every identity becomes purely contingent. This implies that we should not conceptualize power as an *external* relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves (Mouffe, 2005(b), p.21).

To (mis)interpret and apply this more literally to my installation practice, I find this notion of contingency, and agency, useful in thinking how the 'outside' threat of redevelopment and, conversely, the 'outside' nature of a feral-social can both be introduced inside the gallery project space through my little objects, demons within, undoing the unified appearance of space of the building by appearing to seep in through the pipework.



Julia Kristeva (2002, p.114) draws on the role assigned to negativity by Hegel to assert, “without negativity, there is no longer freedom or thinking. One must consider thinking as a revelation, an exploration, an opening, a place of freedom”. If this negativity leads to more intensive questioning, ripping apart, of existing structure, does Braidotti’s insistence on transcending it not become a restriction in itself?

Kristeva speaks so rarely about visual art, but goes on to formulate a role for art in tapping into this negativity, “If you see a “dripping” of Pollock or an installation in which there are disparate objects, you are driven into twilight states of mind” (Kristeva, 2002, p.115). Perhaps such a twilight might also fall into a feral, in-between-place, of the not fully wild, the not fully civilised; the grey area in creativity between that which can be articulated in words and that which cannot.

Yet it is not just an inner negativity I wish to put the viewer in touch with in *The Drips*. There is a social negativity, as the objects’ germination and incubation through the office architecture undoes the positive, timeless, neutrality of the space, to make it bodily, timely and precarious.

Further, Mouffe’s view of identity being contingent, hybrid, or nomadic has been noted as a meeting point with Braidotti (Ganser, 2009, p.173), when “Both Braidotti and Mouffe embrace nomadic theory as generating rhizomatic constellations of multiple identities and affiliations, as a transgressive strategy that goes against fixity and limiting structures” – which seems exciting as a cross-fertilisation.

However, if it is agreed that this hybridity, heterogeneity and otherness can be found within every identity, every object, then on the one hand:

- a) this goes against the need for a critical artwork to follow an external, theoretically devised remit, as in Mouffe; and on the other
- b) does speaks to a productive, internal negativity as argued for by Julia Kristeva, undermining Braidotti’s insistence on positivity as the only productive force between things.

Taken more literally as a means of interrogating these temporary art spaces in which I am working, and my objects woven within and outside, I reflect on how:

highlighting the contingent nature of what goes on in the internal building, this gallery space, these objects hung in relation to it, the dependency on the structure of the space, with its associated permissions and protection,

Firstly, romantic, melancholy objects retained the function of "pub" – from tables set with drinks and flowers to a cut-out section of a pool table with a pound coin poised to be pocketed into a hole with a Tesco bag beneath it. I wanted to continue to evoke the recent, tangible reality of the pub, and not let the boarded-up façade cut off, bury and smooth over the meaning of the place that this corporation was seeking to wipe out. This then developed into a horror-version of a shopping trolley veering away from brand uniformity, carrying boxes of empty broken eggs, the painted red tips of one carton pointing out of the bars like multiple nipples; the glove I wore to push the still-wet-painted-handle from studio to site enmeshes this border too, caught red-handed. Its multitudinous egg shells, mostly empty but some with golden, chocolate money yolks and clear glass wax whites flowing out of them, equating the productive / unproductive waste of consumerism / resistance to consumerism with a rampant, threatening fertility and infertility. Meanwhile, the texts I painted on the boarding were written as if voiced by the pub itself, highlighting the humanness and community affection that the forthcoming supermarket would not be able to offer.

It was a feral performance in its illegality and vandalism, as I scurried around at night. There was a childishness

mirrors installing a work on the external, boarded up building, improvised structure, where I assert the same rights but rather than being merely contingent, they have either already passed or never existed.

In each case in my work, internal or external, I have a will to go against the given structure, usually not by breaking into it, but rather by creating another structure that runs against it, creating an alternative that lays over\_\_\_\_\_

under---through---it

another reality that interweaves and questions the lines of the existing boundaries.

*The Drips* act in excess of the structure they hang off, extending and softening its lines.



adopted in this private protest, like fingering a scab when no one is looking: writing on the boards with emotionally loaded and irrational statements when no one can see, letting them be painted clean then doing it all over again.

It was carried out before I had heard about agonism, and I wasn't thinking about the feral either. It was a response at an emotional level - as in the "surplus emotion" of crisis and of riot, as Joshua Clover says (2016, p.1) - to the takeover and loss of a vulnerable site on my doorstep: **surplus building, surplus objects, surplus merriment, surplus us**. Except the group protest was quiet, civilised, singular; my riot antagonistic, persistent, performed multiple times, but carried out alone, channelled into objects and paint on the threshold of a building. They were not singular objects either, they were clustered in groups, forming an intention even if it is not yet named and given voice.

When I later read about agonism I had to confront the limits of what an artwork can do. How could I claim my work as violence, antagonism when carried out only within the safety of objects, the threat of destruction imagined, not real? Yet violence against property is counted as violence in law. I am not breaking windows, but I am overlaying boundaries, painting corporate buildings, contesting their new ownership with physical obstruction; contesting their right to take away this place of community value, meeting and meaning through financial acquisition. I refuse this logic.

The North Pole pub protest works trespassed upon, and refused, the acquisition of the space claimed by the supermarket. The practice also acted beyond and outside the structure of the organised protest.

The memory of the act of painting the text, the physicality of that painting, slapdash and dripping as it was, is distinct from the words I chose to write. These acts perhaps gave the closest thrill to riot, as I scurried around at night with pots of paint, filled with constant adrenalin and anxiety of a police car passing me mid-paint on this main road. The act of defacing property seemed definitively more criminal than that of hanging objects on it.















Writing about Joseph Beuys' use of materials, Andrea Duncan (1995, p.85), invokes the Greeks, for whom bodily liquid

was the living vital sap, a sap which flowed as well as was contained, a quality as much of movement as of moisture... Like Beuys, the ancients seemed open to an exchange: they were not so focused on objectboundaryhood... Fat had the quality of seepage through the pores of the skin and it was a two-way process.

Duncan also circles around Kristeva, exploring Beuys' use of materials as a 'feminine' language, "'abject', connected to menstruation, sacrifice, and the waxing and waning of the watery moon" (1995, p.84). In *The Drips*, the boundary of the building is traversed by the objects utilising the existing structure of the ventilation unit and pipes it is built around, seeping out and hanging off it like elements of procreation bursting out of decrepit sexual reproduction apparatus. And whilst one of Matta-Clark's planned utopian balloons might break through the roof and project upwards, confident of bestowing social goodness below (Lee and Matta-Clark, 2001, p.211), mine is a drooping, inward-looking, sodden balloon, lumpy and sinking by its own weight of social/sexual fluids.

The specifically female objects are stripped from their gendered subject (myself) and laid out to find a relation with the space, which is non-gendered. As for the male "fear of female dissolution and death" (Duncan 1995, p.85, citing Kaplan, 1991, p.38) – I am saying yes! The female appears to be a threat, but rather than burying these dark connotations let's explore them in the open, as means of reclaiming and dissolving the sexual binary, but not just that, space itself. Jane Rendell, (2010, p.30) says, "In patriarchy men own women and space. Women do not own their own space but are space for men. The space of property is defined

Paul McCarthy ascribed a transformative role to the liquids used in his performances with objects, stating "The liquids – the ketchup and all that – was a way of sort of getting the thing going and I began to think of it that way – like almost once the liquids were introduced into the action, the action then started, as if, you know, whatever transformation took place with the persona or the materials, once liquid was introduced then it began, and without the liquids then it wouldn't begin...' (McCarthy to Martin, 1992).

The performance carried out with my objects was also enlivened by liquids, but these were all channelled into the making. As far as what was seen by others, any persona was removed both from the space and from the organ-like sculptures. Bringing them together in the space there was no shamanistic dance to bring them into action. They hang somewhat morbidly; they are not here for your entertainment. Yet perhaps these liquids, in flowing movement, less easily controllable, extend and change the object, from one form to another, becoming a feral activity that runs through them, a residue of which they retain.

by boundaries, walls that are closed, fixed and permanent, with controlled thresholds.” I then make some play of the further patriarchal view that “the female remains formless, taking, within the Symbolic order, only a shape which is given. Liquid has become the missing place of woman, and like life, she is full of corruption” (Duncan, 1995, p.84), as this is subverted as a source of power, an ability to metamorphose, dissolving the sexual binary whilst the objects and their fluids lay waste to, eat away at, and make mockery of the patriarchal structure of the white cube space; the physical walls as they seep through the pipework to cross them; and the boundaries of my own body that would otherwise host these organs, where, as Peggy Phelan says (1993, p.30) “In excessively marking the boundaries of the woman’s body, in order to make it thoroughly visible, patriarchal culture subjects it to legal, artistic, and psychic surveillance”.

Entertaining a transsexual reverie, surrounded by junk and empty buildings, Kelley imagines a dominant relation with the space expressed through male sexuality; meanwhile a female sexuality flows out to escape its boundaries, but only as a male liquid “This is my ivory tower. I am Rapunzel. My hair immediately grows to floor length whilst I pluck a lute and blow panpipes. Yes, my cornsilk tresses stream down the tower’s side like cum down a masturbated phallus. It stands erect and alone – my ivory tower” (2003, p.7). Though not referred to as such without irony, it is now even more the case that an artist’s ivory tower no longer exists, or if it does, it is becoming the privilege of the very wealthy few. My relation with my studio becomes infested with this precarity, this dependency. The little objects are piled on top of one another, little vermin within the double-glazed, new build block.

How long will I be able to afford to keep them here?

Did I really walk the stolen shopping trolley all the way up from Battersea, where I had found it, through the poshest parts of Kensington and Chelsea to its scaggiest north-west border, parking it outside the pub? It was a performance where I took on the role of thief and protestor simultaneously. Perhaps I wore the T-shirt I had made for attending the Council meetings open to the public on which I had written “Make love not Tesco”. Yet as it is undocumented, it is as if it never happened, the images have taken over as the artwork.

The nomadic adaptation of my objects from one space to another is often only possible following installations I have made in arranged spaces, the objects in the protest works usually being removed and destroyed by the relevant authority, in an assertion that these objects do not belong. The documentation of the works through photography and writing tread the border lines of space, of belonging and not belonging, both tying the work to the location and removing it from it by placing it within a digital and printed archive space, which is also nomadic.

I parked the trolley at night and in the morning there was snow, further disguising any message embedded in the objects.



To be clear, I am not claiming this precarity, this ferality as my own subject position. The question of being able to afford the space to make art is not the same as that of being able to afford the space to live. Yet the scarcity of affordable options of both is related, when neither have apparent value against the profitability of private property developments in London.

James Butler (2013) conducts an extensive interview with a former social housing tenant of Balfour Tower, who speculates that the temporary artist live/work tenants of this residential block are in a very different position to her. The author describes artists as “the shock troops of gentrification, of course, in varying degrees of complicity”, and his interviewee relays local consensus that the artists’ parents will simply buy them flats somewhere else when their tenancies end. Meanwhile his subject faces being forced to move to an area outside London “which comes up as strong EDL [English Defence League]” and as she and her child are of mixed-race she is fearful of racism. Artists being forced out of London because of high living and studio costs may or may not face such problems. In the climate of devaluation of art education in schools, and the increased cost of pursuing art in higher education, there is a danger that the assumption of an artist being white, free of dependents and socially and financially mobile becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Lack of affordable studio space can only contribute to this.

Power relays the horrifying speculation made by Carol Duggan, who is Mark Duggan’s aunt, that “Mark Duggan’s execution was part of a gentrification process; that police violence and racist police violence was tied to a process of the gentrification of Tottenham” (Clover to Power, 2016, 1:03:40). A racialised subject position may not be my own, any more than Clarke’s subjugating term “feral” was Duggan’s own. However, my refusal of this subjugation, and such racialised violence, contributes to the minoritarian action my reclaiming of the feral makes through my art practice.

In an aggressive move by Tesco, “‘systemic’ violence” as Žižek might classify it (2008, p.1), before the Council’s decision on the appeal against their takeover of the site has even been announced, they put up boarding, first over the doorway, then the whole building in Tesco corporate blue, and start the de(con)struction work. It is rumoured they are pouring concrete down the cellars, meaning that, whatever the verdict, the building can never be rescued as a pub. With my platform space of the doorway removed, my practice moves into more dialogical terrain and becomes text based, as I paint on the boarding using Tesco’s own colours, but roughly scrawled, seeking to undo the corporate message.







The series of protest texts I painted seem slightly embarrassing to me now, as the cause has been protested and lost: “Make love not Tesco”, “Tesco doesn’t love you”, “Tesco stole my soul”, the seasonal “Santa hates Tesco”. Yet perhaps the emotional content creates a productive embarrassment, acting in contrast to the apparently rational, reasoned, corporate purchase of the building. Such an approach can also be found in Sharon Hayes’ anti-war performance *Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think it’s Time for Love?* (2007), in which she stood in front of a UBS bank headquarters in Manhattan to recite a love letter to passersby in the circumstances of the Iraq war; or in the higher power evoked by Paul Chan and Badlands Unlimited (2017) in their recent series of anti-Trump posters, incorporating words such as “God hates Trump”.

The immediacy of words is undeniable. Yet it is the objects in their environments that I come back to – if only through these images – with their hidden and unarticulated forms of meaning that would be difficult to summarise in such protest statements – the physical things gathered together as visual poems that are sacrificed as flytipping protest at the door of the building site.

Domestically, living in a middle flat, several times flooded from above, ceiling sagging, wood-work stained brown, thick with matter picked up from the layers in between our habitats; then, in turn, the times I flooded the flat below, tap left running washing a jumper in the sink, plumber dumping water over their ceiling, the broken toilet dripping, and then the bath I left running for over an hour when I was four months’ pregnant.

Sanya Kantarovsky’s *Feral Neighbours* (2016) exhibition painted everyday figures engaged in lonely perversions within a large apartment complex in Moscow. Haunted, cartoon-like, the social conditions of these characters termed feral are fairly opaque, but they share a commonality of oddness within their imagined private practices. The creepy element within: the rat crawling down the drainpipe; the crack in the paint; the puppet in the bed. Between the wild and the domestic, they are firmly the latter, but they seem to strive for freedom within it.

In the end, I found text on its own could not communicate everything I wanted to say: it might represent one facet, just as agonistic struggle could tie a protest work to a cause, but the objects had other meanings for me that might partly relate to the cause and partly relate to a wider social, material and imaginative context for the work. With its interchangeable definitions, perhaps one of the values of the feral is in meanings that are torn crossing a threshold and never fully translate, just as the physical works are lost in these small protests I have made. The loss removes the attachment of the object to a fixable place, a fixable purpose. For me this mirrors the devaluation that the lootings enacted in the London riots. The Nike trainers, freed of their selling points, their marketability, their apportioned profit margin, lost their potency of position and became objects to be commandeered by the finder, the scavenger (the stealer).





The  
civil  
slowly  
turns  
feral,  
it  
creeps  
up on  
you.  
It's  
not a  
single,  
external  
trigger,  
but an  
antag-  
onism  
that  
already  
ex-  
isted  
with-  
in.







THE TOWN OF NORTH POLE  
NORTH POLE  
ROAD, W. 10.

TESCO DOESN'T LOVE YOU





Next to it a similar  
multiplicity of orific-  
es in the long,

double-  
headed

|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|  
|

holly  
hock

the second head at-  
tached to its base ei-  
ther a second mouth,  
a second vagina, or an  
anal protrusion. The  
lumps of the buds run-  
ning along its length  
suggestive of colorec-  
tal bulges or

A Chelsea College of Arts  
garden remnant, it is one of  
many that flower around the  
time of the MA degree shows.  
I must pull it from the  
ground before it is hacked  
down by the ground staff,  
and I will have no warning  
of when they will do so.

Yanking it from the ground  
will kill it; I should let  
it bloom first. And I will  
need a second head to splice  
onto the base of the first.

Yet I need to act speedily  
enough before the hollyhocks  
are considered overgrown,  
by the ground staff who  
are themselves hacked from  
place, divided and moved  
around the different colleg-  
es by the University before  
they become too entrenched,  
too powerful, too strongly  
rooted in one place.





tumours, in a mixing of the sexual and digestive.

The benevolence attached to the Block 336 space and ethos extends to me too. The Director organises permission for me to park in one of the private disabled bays at the front, of which there are many, providing for the clients upstairs. She says my daughter is welcome and helps me carry the buggy downstairs. The baby fluctuates between sleeping and observing me work. Motherhood is functional, the needs open and understood, artisthood is illicit, private, dysfunctional, a need to do and make odd things, to be carried out on the sly whilst I can get away with it, like putting up a protest late at night. Conversely, motherhood is cumbersome, hindering availability, sociability in the restrictions on time, dependence on help; moveability in getting to places with a child. When seeking to show myself as being available to take on exhibitions; tutoring work, motherhood can become illicit too: hiding the baby bump, the leaking milk.

The reduction of the sexual to biological function/dysfunction is repeated in the two pieces incorporating fabric, the hanging bra and the skirt on the wall behind it, both in bridal white, corrupted and overtaken by

**black,  
monstrous matter**

**them.**

**from  
protruding**

Made in 2014 ahead of getting married, this blackness is menstrual -but not just, nor even obviously, that- full-stop. Neither is it just death -full-stop. Both objects fail to contain a mass that is emerging, dark, threatening. It is corrosive; it may or may not still be alive. Virginity has already been sullied, a threshold already crossed, the blood having turned black as it pushes through, its reproductive merits questionable. It's not even blood, it is left over roofing mastic found lying around in my old studio building, Parkham Street in Battersea, with its wondrous, squalid garden of unwanted treasure. The bra and skirt were both found there too, thrown out by a studio neighbour who was squatting in the studio whilst between flats. Probably the frame too, but I forget.

With *The Drips*' allusions to motherhood, the bodily and its waste, it could easily be described in terms of the abject. However, the abject remains circumscribed in the business of analysing the waste and how it relates to the self, the ego.

Chilean artist Carina Úbeda Chacana evokes a similar relationship between fertility and waste to *The Drips* in her sculptural installation *Cloths* (Vartanian, 2013), her dangling, blackened apple ova hung above collected period stains echoing the gravitational pull of my *Drips*. However, as with Mary Kelly, the bodily fluids are framed very prettily, here in embroidered frames and labelled – neatly – as abject, as she “stitched the words ‘Production’, ‘Discard’, and ‘Destroyed’ below each of the stains” (Vartanian, 2013). Whilst expressing anger at its rejection as abject, it is still separated out as such. Judy Chicago's *Menstruation Bathroom* (1972) also contained this difficulty between the shock of bodily matter and its partitioning – her whole installation inaccessible and only viewable through a window.

If, however, a feral activity runs through the practice; the objects' liquids, it can scavenge the abjected waste, and make something else of it. I don't have a fetish for the real thing, I'm OK with using phony old art materials. Perhaps that's because the bodily liquids for me are not just bodily, they are metaphors for a social resilience and continuation, like the red paint in *Painting the Roses Red* (2017). Similarly, as the piss, the spit, the people are abjected from these pubs, a life blood



that was previously inside, in the process of it being squeezed out, the evocation of alcoholic fluids through coloured water and dirty glass wax gives an appearance of resuscitating a building, to suggest it is still alive (open). There is no need to use actual beer or wine.

Observing the skin forming on my milky coffee as I prepared to write this morning, I take pleasure in the mild horror of its movement, as if there is a creature wrestling underneath it, like a kicking foetus under human skin as recorded by Mary Kelly in her *Antepartum* (1973) video. I thought of and re-read Kristeva's memorable description of her abject experience of this milk skin

pitiful as a nail paring – I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it" (Kristeva, 1982, p.2-3).

Granted, this is not my food revulsion, but still, as with the nappies, it is not horror and disgust that had caught my attention in the moving milk skin, but rather the imaginary presence of life, and the potential monster – perhaps a foetal monster – under the surface, that resonates with the interests of my work.

Solidifying liquid, squeezed from cow's udders, so cheap, too cheap. Cheap labour, poor cows; poor calves too, taken away from their mothers. The flimsy boundary that forms over this is pourous as the pipework of *The Drips* and my dirty tea towel draped over it, with its gashing holes. "These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit" are not, to me, what life "withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death" (1982, p.3) but signal the unknown, uncontrollable, animal, uncivilised continuum that runs through us. Even the humour of the lengths I went to in the performance of producing and hanging these little pieces: the feral pulling the abjected object out of its stasis and in-

My  
Grand-  
ma  
would  
save  
the  
cus-  
tard  
skin  
for my  
Gran-  
dad,  
it was  
his  
fa-  
vour-  
ite  
part.  
That  
was  
when  
they  
were  
both  
alive.

trospection. Yet as such, the feral does feed off the abject. Kristeva clarifies that “It is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (1982, p.4); the abject and feral come from a similar place; the difference is in the movement.

Philosopher-journalists Slavoj Žižek (2008) and Adam Curtis (2016) both present the idea that channelling riotous energy into art is an either/or proposition: you either riot or you make art. Simon Critchley (2008) points out “Žižek’s work leaves us in a fearful and fateful deadlock: the only thing to do is to do nothing. We should just sit and wait... But the truth is that Žižek is never ready... He ridicules others’ attempts at thinking about commitment, resistance and action... while doing nothing himself”. Conversely, Žižek concludes his book *Violence* (2008) by saying doing nothing is the most violent thing of all. Yet is making art a distraction that allows us to do nothing or is it in fact doing something? Does this then make art violent or non-violent - or are these either/or propositions just media-spin?

Meanwhile, it was violent of Curtis to portray Martha Rosler in the way that he did, to dismiss feminist performance as apolitical navel gazing in *HyperNormalisation*’s (2016) sea of “hyper” generalisations. The piece he used, *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) was challenging accepted female roles in its rigid delivery of the names and actions of kitchen implements; a riot against a form of violence towards women that his own violence echoes in its narrow fixing of her work. His film eerily predicting the election of Donald Trump, but how can the violence of the depoliticisation that led to Trump’s election be divorced from a continued battle against the “hyper” normalisation of gender roles, the most shocking statistic for me in Trump’s election being that 53% of white women (Chira, 2017) voted for him, despite his well documented attitude towards women.

The internal and external riot must act hand-in-hand.

Rendell describes how “Robert Smithson’s dialectic of ‘site’ (non-gallery) and ‘non-site’ (gallery), developed in the 1960s and early ‘70s, could be described as the first exploration of relational sites through art practice...” meanwhile, “The term ‘off-site’ has been adopted by many contemporary galleries to describe the commissioning and curatorship of works situated outside the physical confines of the gallery, where, in a strange reversal of Smithson’s concept, the gallery is the ‘site’” (Rendell, 2008).

This interchangeability of definitions emphasises to me that it is the movement of practice between places that is of value, and not the fixing of site - or indeed ‘non-site’ - specificity - as the gallery space is no more a neutral one than the public space. To be site-specific suggests that the installation belongs to and can only exist in that pinned space, which I again seek to avoid. The protest works I have created in acts of site-making and site-responsiveness may be seeded in a particular place, with its social, political and material circumstances, but these works seek to disrupt and subvert the rules of the spaces. Often occupying and highlighting the borders of those spaces, they reference what is immediately beyond: physically: inside, beneath; or in time: already past, or threatened for the future.



Beneath, across  
the drop-threshold from

falling

waters breaking

to fallen,

to broken,

a dirty curled up terracotta nappy.



In this vast sea of white-walled-grey-floored-space, it sits on a shiny white raft of creased sheet metal. The little package itself barely reflects the white of the original object. Seeping out and sitting within a large brown ring stain, it retains some sheen of titanium (or is it zinc?) smeared in a translucent layer, whilst **green** bleeds through its surface, and the inside of the object shows the deep brown of the hot fired clay.

Beyond containing the excremental, the surface's discolouration evokes meaty flesh in a state of metamorphosis

**"It's either very new cheese or very old meat..."**, (Saks, 2004).

Titanium and zinc, Titanium and zinc: the pigments of paint and active ingredients of nappy cream.

Thinking of the object as feral and not just abject then transforms what otherwise might be seen as dead, rejected matter into an object imbued with the liveliness of its recent wearer. The top side is animated in a wave movement, like a baby bowing over its tucked-in legs, its extremities like soft hands seeking to explore.

The nappy sculpture is also the documentation of a performance played out and repeated many times over in the studio: my baby performing the excremental function to animate and give form to the nappy; myself as remover of the nappy and how I fold it in order to contain it, get it away from the baby as a contaminated item that she needs to be cleansed of - but also - this item being produced in the studio, studying it as an art object, contemplating its malleability and aesthetic value, making decisions on whether this nappy or that nappy is worth reproducing. By bringing my baby into the studio, what I create then becomes interlinked with what she creates: if she has been able to create an object, an original 'still life', then I tell myself I should at least justify my own presence in the studio and create one too.

Where do my studios sit within the gentrification of the Brixton area?

Up the road from the booted out traders, in Stockwell, I rent a new-build studio in a mixed-use building. It mirrors Block 336, in the art provider being sheltered by the charitable status of another. Notting Hill Housing Association student hall accommodation occupies most of the floors, with ACME-provided studios on the bottom two, and an ~~apparently vacant floor in between, designated as office space but no one has let it yet, apparently there have been squatters right from the start, but it is sectioned off and we never see them~~ that at the time of writing up this project it is suddenly announced will be developed into live/work units, thereby crossing the spheres from above and below, the domestic and studio spaces. Unfortunately for me, it also pulls apart - at least temporarily - the practicalities of the space, the reasons I chose it, waited for it: its rel-



Is she the feral element as the one who dirties and wets the clean nappies? Or is it the nappy as the contained/uncontained space? Or is it myself for carrying her across this threshold into the art space, for taking her privately soiled nappies and opening them up for reproduction and spectacle?

The nappy sits in counter balance to the glass wax empty womb sculptures hanging above it: one a thin icicle, the other swollen round, both crystallised at the end of their efforts. There was a performance of experimentation involved in reproducing these items too; trying to find a way to create a translucent empty womb form with hot wax and condoms. Many of the experiments burst, like failed attempts to procreate. Finally I realised, aided by internet research, that the way around introducing the hot element without bursting the condom was to fill it with water.

All the time, I am working with what is at hand: the condoms given away free at the sexual health centre.

This is not productive waste.

It is not sellable,  
it will not wash its  
own face.

However, it is reproductive  
(sometimes literally, sometimes not).

active permanence; its qualities as the white cube and the ivory tower that I rally against elsewhere. My studio (out of everyone's) becomes the designated spot at which the builders' containers are placed for the site - their office and lunch space, stacked two stories high outside my window, summarily blocking out the light. Their portaloo directly on the other side of the glass, brings alive the same functions I am playing with in the studio - current experiments of liquids on doggy pee pads - and the faecal element in the nappy sculptures. The noise drives me out of using the space and I argue for a rent waiver. The domestic arriving upstairs is driving out my own domestic as I can't bring my daughter here to work whilst she is sleeping as before. Suddenly I feel I have come full circle and that I should move out again - either to a contingent space - as Parkham Street was - or further out of London and find a way of constructing a studio









Despite the shitty circumstances, it survives and thrives. Moving outward from the nappy creature dribbling on its float, the oozing of matter becomes more nourishing as it emerges and trickles out of scratched and twisted breasts, likewise made of clay.

Whilst Kristeva says that “For Klein, play was the royal road to the unconscious, the same function that the dream served for Freud” (2001(a), p. 48). My use of play in the work is somewhat more deliberate than a child’s, and carried out on fragments that portray my own bodily organs, a dismemberment of my own reality. As the fragments are tentatively advanced to seek a relation with the space, this then seems a somewhat masochistic game, just as the Parkham Street protest (which I will elaborate on later) would spell out the artists’ (my own) forthcoming expulsion.

Introducing play in the orchestration of objects in my Balmoral Castle pub installation (2014), I no longer wished to use text to announce the work’s cause, instead asking the tropes contained within the objects to provide a quiet opening onto the protest element of the work, without spelling out the politics. Haraway says, (2004, p.2), “Tropes are a way of swerving around a death-defying and death-worshipping culture bent on total war, in order to remember - in material-semiotic reality- the fragile, mortal and juicy beings we really are”. The objects presented without words could then avoid framing the work only as one meaning: contestation. It was also melancholic, festive, haunted. Yet they do not speak to the extremes of death and war. They address the more mundane, everyday, systemic violence of local governmental control, or basic apathy. Who can fight that?

The Balmoral Castle, for the namesake of one of the Queen’s residences, is located in the centre of Churchill Gardens Estate, the London housing estate where earlier in the year I staged *Passport to Pimlico*. The Estate’s medium-rise housing blocks reference distinguished figures from the UK’s history, primarily literary: Chaucer, Shelley, Keats, Austen; Elgar and Darwin are also here.

domestically again. Is this what writing about gentrification is telling me? **Move on!** Simultaneously I feel the opposite, that I should stay and fight it out, somehow pay for it.

A protected pocket, the studio is expensive but about as cheap as you can get for a London studio. Large, a third of my scholarship goes on studio rent, I don’t know what I’ll do when it runs out. The found objects have run out. My shiny, professionalised studio building has strict policies about waste disposal, taking out of circulation the kind of waste objects I relied on for people to leave lying around that let me create so many new things from old things in Parkham Street.















The Estate is frequently reported for its stabbings and drug dealings (Davenport, 2014). The pub has been kept shut for 11 years by Westminster Council, at the cost of over £20,000 per year in scaffolding, following its apparent fall into disrepair (Welham, 2010). Hidden out of sight of the main roads in Pimlico, I wonder if the Council was relieved for it to no longer have a pub in the middle.

This is the same Council that would not renew Chelsea College of Arts' student bar licence in 2015, its loss assisted by a lack of contestation either by our Dean or indeed by the student body, when quizzed by the Student Union as to how strongly they felt about keeping it. Isn't life just more manageable if these respective enclaves of housing tenants and students have no central point for meeting and getting up to no good in? During the Student Union's consultation period, before the fate of the bar was sealed, I put in an unsuccessful bid to turn it into a 1930s-40s-style Milk Bar (*Milk Bar*, 2017). Whilst there is no history of prohibition of alcohol as such in the UK, the Temperance Society encouraged these alcohol-free establishments as a "morally acceptable" alternative to pubs. Now such sanitisation of space is achieved through property development.

Installed at Christmas (2014) and using a combination of found, borrowed and created objects, I deliberately avoided text this time, putting the focus on the objects themselves to drive my anger – conceived as agonism – against the agenda of the Council by suggesting an inherent life in this ghostly shell of a pub, calling together a community party, refusing to admit its closure.

Sculptures of dirty wax drinks spilt out of the Council's fencing, fed by a hose-pipe coming out of the ground, as if the pub's cellars were still full and I had found a way of pumping the drink out. Bowls of peanuts were wedged in, their contents spilling over and across the ground beneath. A scrappy hand-drawn

Yet I do not have a fetish for scavenge, either. It is only that I use what is at hand; I do not instigate going out in search of the new, I make do with what is already here. So instead, I turn inwards, forced to look within my own stores, re-finding materials I stopped using a few years ago, materials I had stockpiled when my studio was still in my flat, before my husband moved in and made me separate the space, clean out the plaster pit that I slept in; supplies I have trailed round studios since: mouldy clay, stale plaster. Now with my newborn daughter asleep in the sling against me, I revert to these older, internalised stores, like flesh within. What else do I have? I will use them up before I go looking elsewhere, before she wakes up.



dartboard invited both play and a target to shoot at. Crappy, used, dated Christmas decorations acted like my May Day celebrations here in combining festivity with protest; a riot that utilises playful mechanisms to entice others to engage and join. They are also similarly a means of an offering, a message to the community: I come in peace; a message to and from the pub: celebrate and be merry, in order to retaliate.

Just another building in the ongoing gentrification and sanitation of the wilder parts of London's body. Highlighting what does not fit, what has lost its use, the art objects are aligned with a feral that does not adhere to defined values and uses. I gave my decrepit-looking objects an agency to playfully commandeer the pub, as if they could effect change that I could not. However, this was not to claim the secret power of objects but to point towards the social element that had been displaced from the site, that is being lost and covered up. The objects, like the threatened, defeated pub, are grubby, melancholy, not economically valuable, but through their improvised set-up, ignoring the building's redundancy, implore for a hidden community value.

I revisited the site after Christmas and most of the objects were still there; the peanuts and dartboard were gone. It took weeks before the Council bothered with removing it.

I had adopted the stolen shopping trolley from the bins at the back of an estate near my previous studio, a temporary ACAVA space in Parkham Street, Battersea. I took on the theft myself to paint up the trolley and make it an artwork. This was partly out of a need to make it a Tesco coloured trolley rather than its found brand, but as I painted it so thickly and made up as I went along what I thought it might look like, it became something of mine rather than of a corporation. I filled it with some of my own studio objects, willing to sacrifice them as art offerings rather than art products. No one would be buying these.

Finding the trolley extended my scavenging practice only slightly outside the gardens of this bountiful former Salesian College, with its treas-

ures of old objects to be found on a daily basis.

This was a haphazard and sociable community, where studio holders grew food in the College's garden, enjoying the cheapest rents in town. Yet this too became a site of protest for me. I now reflect that it was triggered at the point the artists were cast as feral, unsavoury, unprofitable, unwelcome.

Again, I did not initiate a group protest but put up and photographed the signs in secret, both inside and outside the school buildings where 60 artists including myself had temporary studios pending the school being demolished to be turned into luxury flats and an Academy school. Antagonism arose when the security guards and the Father in charge of the school started to change access arrangements with the artists and brought forward the date by which we had to leave the studios. Planning permission had not been granted by the time we left, but it seemed that we were no longer wanted.

The new academy school has been named Saint John Bosco College, and they say they have adopted his motto, "It is not enough for every child to be loved, they must know that they are loved" (St John Bosco College, 2017). Yet benevolence can be withdrawn at any time.

It was summer 2013, and the school setting and the rejection of unpredictable artists evoked for me the wider rejection of art from school curricula at that time, and my series of installations spoke to both situations. The banners, card and hanging devices were constructed from materials found on site at the school, and the text reflected and highlighted the message from those in power, the materials and politics remaining immanent to it.

Occupying this seemingly moralised ground, it seemed we were simply a feral incident in between older and newer, more profitable buildings for providing such care to those who deserved it. We never had any right to stay there. So why don't I just let these old buildings go?





NO  
TERRITORY  
FOR ART

Youth Music Project  
15 D.C. St. City, 080 000 000  
0741 232 000

PARKHAM STREET SW11

100  
H  
2





Set in place  
to Commemorate the Beatification  
of  
**DON RUA**  
and blessed by  
Very Reverend Father  
FRANCIS TREANOR, S.D.B., RECTOR.  
29th October 1972.






**CANTEEN MENU**

Chicken Curry	£2.50	Chicken Curry	£2.50
Beef Curry	£2.50	Beef Curry	£2.50
Vegetable Curry	£2.50	Vegetable Curry	£2.50
Spaghetti	£2.50	Spaghetti	£2.50
Pasta	£2.50	Pasta	£2.50
Salad	£2.50	Salad	£2.50
Hot Drink	£1.00	Hot Drink	£1.00
Cold Drink	£1.00	Cold Drink	£1.00
Ice Cream	£1.00	Ice Cream	£1.00
Chocolate Cake	£1.00	Chocolate Cake	£1.00
Apple Pie	£1.00	Apple Pie	£1.00
Cricket	£1.00	Cricket	£1.00
Football	£1.00	Football	£1.00
Handball	£1.00	Handball	£1.00
Table Tennis	£1.00	Table Tennis	£1.00
Badminton	£1.00	Badminton	£1.00
Swimming	£1.00	Swimming	£1.00
Rowing	£1.00	Rowing	£1.00
Sailing	£1.00	Sailing	£1.00
Canoeing	£1.00	Canoeing	£1.00
Archery	£1.00	Archery	£1.00
Shooting	£1.00	Shooting	£1.00
Boxing	£1.00	Boxing	£1.00
Judo	£1.00	Judo	£1.00
Sambo	£1.00	Sambo	£1.00
Wrestling	£1.00	Wrestling	£1.00
Weightlifting	£1.00	Weightlifting	£1.00
Table Tennis	£1.00	Table Tennis	£1.00
Badminton	£1.00	Badminton	£1.00
Swimming	£1.00	Swimming	£1.00
Rowing	£1.00	Rowing	£1.00
Sailing	£1.00	Sailing	£1.00
Canoeing	£1.00	Canoeing	£1.00
Archery	£1.00	Archery	£1.00
Shooting	£1.00	Shooting	£1.00
Boxing	£1.00	Boxing	£1.00
Judo	£1.00	Judo	£1.00
Sambo	£1.00	Sambo	£1.00
Wrestling	£1.00	Wrestling	£1.00
Weightlifting	£1.00	Weightlifting	£1.00

Please wash up  
your mug after use!



Thank you!

**CANTON MENU**

Chicken Curry	£2.50	Chicken Curry	£2.50
Beef Curry	£2.50	Beef Curry	£2.50
Vegetable Curry	£2.50	Vegetable Curry	£2.50
Spaghetti	£2.50	Spaghetti	£2.50
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Sambo	£1.00	Sambo	£1.00
Wrestling	£1.00	Wrestling	£1.00
Weightlifting	£1.00	Weightlifting	£1.00

**LOST PROPERTY**



Please report to the main office  
for all lost & found.

K. Dunne, Headmaster.

Children must  
be taught  
what to think.

Y9 "PUBLIC PLACES, PERSONAL SPACES"

Year 9 students studied Public Art and Graffiti, looking at the work of Banksy, Keith Haring and Eduardo Paolozzi. They collaborated to create a positive slogan or message about education and their future. These posters were inspired by the work of Keith Haring and his bold, bright colourful imagery.

ALL  
ART  
CANCELLED



KEEP LEFT

ALL ART OUT



The lining up of the breasts resonates with a child placing toy bricks on the floor.



As the fragments are tentatively advanced to seek a relation with the space, it is not the massacre of the breasts by the absent attacker but their resilience propelling them forward. Here resonating with Braidotti's view that

matter, including the specific slice of matter that is human embodiment, is intelligent and self-organizing. This means that matter is not dialectically opposed to culture, nor to technological mediation, but continuous with them. This produces a different scheme of emancipation and a non-dialectical politics of human liberation. This position has another important corollary, namely that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities. Subjectivity is rather a process of auto-poiesis or self-styling, which involves complex and continuous negotiations with dominant norms and values and hence also multiple forms of accountability (Braidotti, 2013, p.35).

I was reading Kristeva's biography of Melanie Klein whilst making these breasts, drawn to the idea of the child being born with an inherent fighting spirit, a natural antagonism, as expressed through objects, and firstly the mother's breast

*'From the beginning the destructive impulse is turned against the object and is first expressed in phantasised oral-sadistic attacks on the mother's breast, which soon develop into onslaughts on her body by all sadistic means' (Klein quoted in Kristeva, 2001(a), p. 61, Kristeva's emphasis).*



Yet whilst they are non-dialectical I do still see the objects as oppositional in the sense of me choosing to install them to create a story that generates from the building and its fate, rather joining in the game of the white cube space and the paintings hung around it.

There is a tactic of using the objects to “fertilise” the space - to procreate with it - but not heterosexually to produce children - rather the objects penetrate and disable the structure’s rigidity, overrunning it in a creeping out and spreading of their contorted, hybrid sexual morphology, like weeds breeding between cracks in paving stones, the objects emerging from the unseen parts of the building, parts that pre-existed the space’s white cube persona, allowing entry to things which are not simply darker and dirtier but also more virile.

As Elizabeth Grosz elaborates on Darwin’s notion of the relationship between art and sexual selection, my objects’ undoing of structure, of purpose, through their negative, dripping, non-conforming slime, can also be seen as an affirmative and creative force in their feral activity:

If art is rooted in the ways in which sexual selection deviates from natural selection, making properties, qualities, organs, and muscles function not only usefully but also intensively, art is the capacity of materiality to function in ways other than what is given... Art is the means by which nature deviates itself from givenness, comes to function in other terms than the useful or the manageable... (Grosz, 2011, p.185).

I would equally apply this to my practice’s deviating activity from the givenness and function of found objects and buildings. Grosz goes on:

My breasts are now objects for a child, an infant, my daughter, at her mercy to feed from, play with, attack. Rather than the objects operating in antagonism towards the space, my daughter’s fight with me is absorbed within their own constitution. Functional and revolt-ing in purpose and form, to the point of being anti-sexy when compared with a smooth and sinewy woman-as-muse’s aesthetically pleasing breast.

Complicating things further, the breasts, proceeding like molehills as they follow a bronze bed-pan-bottle ship, form a feminist, feminising procession that simultaneously absorbs aspects of male sexuality.

Firstly it is - deliberately - unclear (unknown to the viewer, unknown to myself) whether these objects are sailing through a sea of urine or breastmilk, or a full concoction of all of the weeping bodily fluids from above and below. Secondly, that the leader is a male bed pan, but opened up with a caesarean-like surgical cut, giving it a hybrid sexuality that incorpo-

Art is an agent of change in life... to affect subjects, but also objects and matter itself. Art is the excess of matter that is extracted from it to resonate for living beings... Art denaturalizes life. It erupts from within a natural order, whether animal or human, but also radically transforms and disrupts life, it detours life through intensity, force, pleasure, and pain as no natural or given forces can. Art is created, always made, never found, even if it is made from what is found. This is its transformative effect - as it is made, so it makes (Grosz, 2011, pp.185 and 189).

Grosz then not only allows a fluid relationship between subject and object; art and sexuality, but in doing so empowers art's material role in transforming order.

She is notably writing about contemporary Aboriginal art, which she says enacts such transformation on artificial materials just as natural ones, mirroring Trigger's (2008) findings that Aboriginal culture does not reject feral, non-native plant and animal species. Whilst I initially flinch at Grosz's optimism for materials such as acrylic paint and clay to "become the resources for an incantation of the future beyond the history of annihilation that successive governments have accomplished" (2011, p.191), I realise I similarly invest my struggles in similarly flimsy materials. I cannot claim the historical, racial lineage of resistance against atrocity of the Aboriginal artists she describes; the history I invoke is of a present-about-to-become-historical, a short-lease tenant about to be evicted, a community space turned over to profit. Yet the arguments she makes for art's material disruption as a narrative disruption are echoed in my own strategy of resistance of making objects without defined purpose; entangling these objects in gentrifying spaces. On a day-to-day level, my resistance, like that of the aboriginal artists she describes, is in the continued act of making the work.

rates an interrupted, severed womb; its head another of the vagina seed-pods as in the hanging red meat piece at the top left corner of the installation, which when read like a page, now brings us to its end.

As with the empty condom that becomes the shape of a womb, am I in fact ~~stealing~~ neutralising all of the masculinity ~~from~~ in these objects, commandeering them with female weaponry, juices and

Ettinger, 2006, p.185, points out that:

In Hebrew, the verb passing (*avar*, from the root *a.b.r.*) describes pregnancy. The pregnant woman is *meouberet*: she is a transport station, a station of passage for a period of passage, and she herself is a conductor, a conveyer, a transmissive and transitive vector, a transit place, a transition time, a scavenging channel for a transition period. To be pregnant, *meouberet*, is to expand the boundaries, to be a ferryboat (*maaboret*). The fetus, *oubar*, is the passable, the transferable, the passing-by, a crossing, an elapsing, a going beyond. The same root corresponds to transgression, transport, crossing, transformation, and shifter.











Water. Whilst the liberal globules of glass wax in the hanging condom pieces and the tea towel piece make the most direct reference to water, all of the above-ground objects in the installation, in their hanging and falling state, become fluid-like drip-objects. Dissolving and solidifying the liquids of life, they descend from the ceiling, through procreative appeal, into waste and then out of that waste, their own form of reproduction.

It is a theatricality of materials – the fluids are no longer in action, in motion – the installation operates in a sphere of fantasy: the fear of dripping, the imagined flood on the floor it results in.

Nonetheless, there is a hi(story) of liquids, melting and solidifying, within the materials of the objects. The wax spells that out in the traces of its movement. The bronzes – one had been a seed pod, another a growing plant, the third an NHS cardboard bedpan (male). Each went through the stages of having a pouring and ventilation system melted on to them in wax and rosin; being invested in bucket upon bucket of wet plaster and grog; being placed in a kiln for 3 days to burn out the original item and its wax system; having molten bronze poured into the cooked investment to produce the bronze object. Subsequently, the solidified pouring and ventilation system sawn off, the stubs of metal ground back and the form rediscovered.

As if there are actual squatters in the space, these forms simultaneously domesticate and un-domesticate the office equipment: the air con unit's utility has been corrupted, although it is not clear which became redundant first, the infectious-looking laundry hung up to dry, or the unit itself.

Perhaps redundant is the wrong word; the objects are still being used, just not quite as intended. The unit is now a hanging device, the tea towel and underwear facilitating the flow of matter rather than drying or containing it.

I have a tendency to keep things beyond their outlived their purpose. The grubby, hole-ridden pants I used in my *No Drawing* (2016) protest outside the Victoria and Albert (V&A) Museum had been sat in the desk drawer in my studio for months. Having at length been relinquished from my domestic drawers, I somehow still felt they might be of use in my art.

My initial anger at the news that the V&A had banned drawing in its 2016 exhibition *Undressed: A Brief History of Underwear*





Also in my personal history, as my waters broke in the foundry, one shoe still on and one work boot on, the water trickling down my legs as I awkwardly asked someone to fetch the industrial blue paper roll for me to use to stem the flow.

The literal, physical ERUPTION  
of the body, of one sphere into another.  
Her sphere into mine.

That combined biology of us both erupting onto the foundry floor; this procreative inner world intruding on my outer, creative one.

At the border between working and not working; I had entered but was transitioning in the changing area, equipping myself to start work.

I did not make a work with that boot,  
evoking that memory in the literal sense, of the liquid

seeping out of that.

However the seepage comes out elsewhere.  
Whilst water doesn't travel far, it does travel.  
It comes out at the weakest point, like the door frame sodden with leaked water from the flat above at home.

(Wainright, 2016), mixed to turn-of-the-stomach anxiety the following day, when I found myself in the museum, undertaking reconnaissance of the site to do an installation. I felt like a little skunk, out to insert a stink bomb, but not wanting to be found out. Feelings of vulnerability, of doing something bad, of being caught. Thinking how to avoid interaction with people, questions, being told off.

Like Tate Britain, it is another bomb-damaged art institution in London, and I tried to find the site of the plaque which states "The damage to these walls is the result of enemy bombing during the blitz of the Second World War, 1939 - 1945, and is left as a memorial to the enduring values of this great museum in a time of conflict." (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2016) only to discover it had been covered up by builders' hoardings.

Instead I exercised the small artistic freedom of sketching in one of the sculpture courts, the one adjacent to the *Undressed* exhibition. It is a freedom I have a tangible memory of from over a decade working in an office, running to nearby museums at lunchtime and squeezing in half an hour of sketching



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Whilst I was working at Block 336, reflecting on the leftover banking space it had housed brought to mind two exhibitions.

Firstly, Adam Chodzko's *Because...* (2013), his commission alongside Laure Prouvost for the *Schwitters in Britain* (Chodzko and Prouvost, 2013) exhibition at Tate Britain. As one element of the installation:

Chodzko proposes that one of Germany's leading banks, Commerzbank, from which Schwitters appropriated the word Merz, is relocating to the Lake District. Boxes of Commerzbank headed paper have been delivered ahead of the move and stacked up in the Merz Barn entrance in Elterwater, as though sealing it off. Before being presented here at Tate they have sat there for the last few months, covered in falling leaves and soaking up rainwater. (Tate, 2013)

The misguided and redundant boxes of headed paper are dissolved by the site, whilst the handmade barn of Schwitters somehow survives the damp conditions, although in reality it remains dependent on continued public funding to keep maintaining it.

Conversely, Phyllida Barlow's 2011 *RIG* at Hauser and Wirth in its former Piccadilly site, a 1920s Lutyens-designed Midland Bank. The press release read:

Inspired by the everyday objects of the city, Barlow has created a group of works that brings the cacophony of the gallery's external surroundings inside. The urban congestion is 'captured like something wild or feral', says Barlow, and is evolved into a purely physical object, stripped of any symbolic context and resituated within the gallery".

But why to strip any symbolic context? Some of the language Barlow uses to describe the concerns of her work resonate with mine, as do the DIY aesthetics of

before running back, usually late. I never worked near the V&A but my dentist's surgery is around the corner so if I had permission to attend a dentist appointment, I would lengthen it by undertaking half an hour or so of drawing here before returning.

Thinking about the values alluded to in the covered-up plaque, I went to my studio and dug out my old pants, whilst also finding a half-work of swirling plaster on found plaster board I had used in my *Damaging Objects* exhibition that seemed to correspond in some way to the damage of the V&A walls. As with my bike racks installation, I had reservations about treading on the toes of such sacred and perilous ground as World War II. Was moral outrage about sketching really comparable? Yet I did not make a direct comparison or reference, rather I brought damage to a handheld level, both in the texture of this small relief and in the holes of the pants that I incorporated into it. One pair pierced by a pencil, the personal



the work, but for those concerns to become opaque within the abstract seems to domesticate their potency, so that only a *feral aesthetic* might be left. However, I note that this phrase “stripped of any symbolic context” is not shown as a direct quote from her.

Barlow (2004, p.213) had previously rallied against the art market:

incarcerating and taming aesthetics, and emasculating and caging form... the wild, untamed and visceral is brought to heel under the whip of consumerist, product-led and commercially driven incentives.

How then could her work not (if only secretly) be responding to its housing in a former bank, by a gallery that banks artwork at the highest financial level? For example, her *untitled; tubes* (2011) piece in the exhibition, looking like two humongous turds, cocoons or tightly wrapped dead bodies perched on top of an old banking safe in the basement of the building: are these turds not exploring a feral tension with their environment?

I submit *The Drips* and it is selected for *Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2016*. Corporately, philanthropically sponsored, can this work still have a feral relation to its surroundings when I bid to be part of this recognised platform and its institutions?

Somehow *The Drips* does translate to the new space. It takes a completely different form, dripping in perpendicular linearity from a great height. I had been worried my little blobs would not re-conjoin without the pipework and air conditioning unit to hang from, that the structure was central to their connection. Yet the installation had become about a liquid social movement; it fed from its location but was not attached to it. Instead I wrote a proposal explaining how I wished to

threshold of the cloth being crossed through art practice to then be placed at the threshold of the institution that removes the small artistic freedom in favour of honouring the “loan agreements” of designer brand lingerie companies. Displaying my pants outside the Museum’s threshold, I am also saying, “Hey, you can sketch my pants for free!” Which I do too, incorporating a sketch of the pants, and the sketch I had made that day in the sculpture court, into the relief.

I had shown my feral bunting in an authorised, organised event, *A Festival of Disobedience* here in 2015, as part of the V&A’s *Disobedient Objects* exhibition, rediscovering the political power of objects from history to the present day. I found it quite shocking that the same museum would agree to such strict and censorious terms for their exhibitions, however much they might need the sponsorship and revenue attached to these paying shows. So my disobedience had to continue less obediently outside its walls.

use the existing architecture and points of crossover from the building / outside world to the “white cube”, as if the objects are leaking or creeping in from outside, corrupting the space. When I was shown my space to install in at the Bluecoat, Liverpool, it was a thrill and a relief to feel that this has been understood: presented with a huge cement crack between the old and new buildings. The space reached so high I had to work with a technician authorised to use the hydraulic ladder to ascend it, with each little piece. My objects remaining domestic in size, despite mounting this grand space, they still felt insignificant, like they could be lost at this periphery, passed by. They clung to and merged into this conjunction between buildings, seeming content to carry out their activity unnoticed.

Like the distinction between materialisms, when the exhibition opens at the Liverpool Biennial 2016, a member of *Frieze Magazine* jokingly asks me if I am I not an old contemporary rather than a new one, having exhibited in it before?

That was in 2013, when this dialogue between inside and outside institutions was just beginning. The exhibitions’ opening at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London had been the same week as my bike racks installation at college. The irony was not lost on me when, simultaneously, my own bike became an accidental, unauthorised artwork attached and irremovable from the ICA sign when I had parked it there for an event. My bike lock froze and none of the ICA staff could help me because, they told me, they would need permission from the Royal Parks to use an angle grinder in the street to cut it off.

Then, the leniency of the workshop staff in my “place of refuge” (if not enlightenment) allowed me to “abuse its hospitality” in lending me a cordless angle grinder to cut it off myself (Harney and Moten, 2013, p.26).

As the feral does not cause a sensation on a day-to-day level, it obviates being captured. Who would want it? The work is not prized for selling, it is not so exotically wild that it needs to be caged and oo-ed an ah-ed at. Instead it can be left to its own devices, dripping around the edges of a building. Here, in the gallery space, providing a bit of lump and gristle for a group show, the objects are only spotted if, whilst looking at the big pictures, they catch the corner of your eye,

like

the

mice

between

the tracks

in a central  
London  
tube  
station.

Scurrying below the giant posters.





If the practice can continue to go outside the institution, even when it is in it; go inside when out; and persist in complexifying, circumventing and traversing the borders of control, ownership and curation of space, then for me the feral activity of art will remain worth pursuing.

## **Conclusion**



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